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A Forgotten Confederate: John H. Ash's Story Rediscovered

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A FORGOTTEN CONFEDERATE: JOHN H. ASH'S STORY REDISCOVERED

by

HEIDI MOYE

(Under the Direction of Anastatia Sims)

ABSTRACT

A historical study of a southern family living in Savannah, GA from shortly before the election of 1860 through the Civil War years based on the journals of John Hergen Ash II (1843-1918).

INDEX WORDS: John Hergen Ash, Savannah, GA, Antebellum South, Civil War, 5th Georgia Cavalry, Georgia Hussars, Estella Powers Ash, Laura Dasher Ash, Eutoil Tallulah Foy Ash

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by

HEIDI MOYE

B. A., Georgia Southern University, 2012

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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by

HEIDI MOYE

Major Professor: Anastatia Sims
Committee: Lisa Denmark
Sue Moore

Electronic Version Approved:
Spring 2017

DEDICATION

For my nanny, Laura Valeria Thigpen Davis.

Fiercely independent, headstrong, and hardworking, my southern grandmother taught me to love the feel of Georgia dirt between my toes and the chirping of birds in the morning while sipping coffee on the porch. I miss her everyday.

For my mama, Robin Lisa Davis Moye.

From one of my earliest memories when my mother took me to a library and placed a book in my tiny hand, she has nurtured in me the joy of learning, the love of literature, and a passion for history.

These two extraordinary women have always been my role models.
I hope I've made them proud.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would have been impossible for me to complete a work like this without a sturdy support network. My family have been invested and interested since the very beginning when we knew next to nothing about the Ash family. Panda, my sister, rode with me in my brother's truck that day. She was the very first to collaborate with me as we talked through the possible scenarios of how a mother and three children all died on the same day. More than that, she's my only favorite sister. My mom has been a rock of support and one who I could always share the latest discovery with. The two of us have spent many hours chatting about the things we still don't know, but can only imagine. My dad always wishes me the best of luck, and he graciously gave me his antique writing desk that he's used to write his sermons for as long as I can remember. Of course, it was Josh, my brother, who lent me his old pickup to ramble in. Not that I didn't have a car of my own, but there's something about those vented side windows and lack of power steering that made dirt road riding just a little bit better. And then there's all of the others in my life who have ever rode with me out to the cemetery to visit the Ashes and hear tidbits of their stories. Family and friends have indulged me by listening and always supporting me through the years.

My supervisor in the Office of Admissions here at Georgia Southern walked into my office one afternoon and slapped an application on my desk. "You are going to college." She insisted, "It isn't an option." With that, my little side project of being curious about the Ash family became an academic pursuit. In my current Georgia Southern home, the Regents Center for Learning Disorders, my work family has been incredibly flexible, kind, interested, and supportive. Thank you all for being respectful of

my closed door, but most of all for welcoming me back into the circle when I come up for air. You guys are my unsung heroes.

Donna, Jane, G.B., and Ben, descendants of John and Lula Ash, have been so generous as they've shared stories of their family with me. Jane was the first to learn of my interest, and she gave me helpful hints of newspaper articles to look up. G.B. and I have exchanged many thoughtful emails about John's military service and where to look for its surviving artifacts. Likewise, Ben has also shown great interest and welcomed me into his home. Donna and I spent a wonderful summer afternoon together pouring over papers and "likenesses" that she has in her possession. It has been such a privilege to get to know the living members of the Ash family and I'm grateful to them for sharing their antecedents with me.

During my time as a student in the Department of History, I've learned much from the faculty. Working with my thesis committee has been an especially rewarding experience. I like to call them my dream team. Sue Moore first listened to my Ash story under the shade of massive oak trees at Mont Repose in South Carolina as we paused for lunch while cleaning that massive kitchen unit in the heat of summer. Her enthusiastic questions sparked a renewal in my research. Lisa Denmark found herself roped into working with me as I took her American Readings course. Her insistent pushing that her students dig harder and read more literature to gain a full understanding of the subject made that class one of the most enjoyable of my college experience. When she recommended that I read *Dwelling Place* by Erskine Clarke, it opened my eyes to Southern history in a brand new way. My chair, Anastatia Sims, has been a godsend in every sense of the word. If there were only one single person to give credit to, she would

be the one I'd thank. For the past couple of years, she has mentored me through every research and writing hurdle I've faced. She's selflessly given me hours of office time and exchanged countless emails discussing issues both big and small. Perhaps most important of all, she has truly believed in me. When I faced months of writers block so severe that I wasn't sure if I could ever write another word, she patiently and carefully helped me work through it. Through the writing process, she has been an expert editor. Her suggestions have endowed a depth and clarity in these pages that I couldn't have accomplished on my own. This work is as much hers as it is mine. It would have been much more difficult without her guidance and mentorship.

Last, but certainly not least, my best friend in the whole world helps keep me sane even when I drive her crazy. Krystina, you are the best. Thank you for listening to my endless ruminations and still wanting me in your life. I am grateful for you.

Oh, and there's one more little person who I wish to acknowledge - my niece, Addison, my favorite ginger midget. Every time she's eagerly enquired, "Aunt Heidi, when will you finish 'your book'?" it has pushed me to return to the writing table once more. Though her little ginger brother, Brody, has only been with us a little over a year, he has brought so much joy into my life.

Though this thesis is complete, the telling of the Ash story is still incomplete. I find comfort in knowing that I can continue to count on all of you for support as I work to finish this manuscript.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discovery & Purpose

Late one summer afternoon more than a decade ago, I was cruising around in my brother's 1960s model Ford pickup truck with the windows down. The dust from the Georgia dirt road kicked up beneath the tires and blew in through the open windows. Earlier in the day I had read an article in *The Sylvania Telephone* about a proposal to place markers along Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman's path on his historic March to the Sea to promote tourism in rural Georgia. A portion of Sherman's march led him through Screven County on Old Louisville Road, which was originally a stagecoach route that ran from Louisville to Savannah. The article stated that Sherman camped for a night at Ogeechee Baptist Church in Oliver, only a few miles from where I lived at the time.

After I passed the church, I continued down the dirt road to see how far it would take me towards Savannah. When I came to a fork in the road, I veered left onto Old Elam Road without realizing I was no longer following Old Louisville Road. Up ahead on the left, there was a small clearing among the pine trees. I slowed down and noticed that it was an old cemetery, overgrown with brambles. When I got out of the pickup to explore the cemetery, one of the gravestones immediately captured my attention. It belonged to Laura Ash, a twenty-four-year-old woman who died on July 24 of 1871. In the grave with her were her three children, Ida, Sarah, and George, all under the age of three. Buried next to her was John H. Ash (1843-1918). Next to him was his third wife,

Eutoil Tallulah Foy Ash (1852-1933).¹

One neglected gravestone of a lost family led to so many questions. Who was Laura V. Ash? How did a young mother and all three of her children come to be buried in the same grave in July of 1871? What caused their deaths? Who was she married to? What was her husband like? Who were her family? How did the people in her community respond to her death?

Even though I had absolutely no idea how to do historical research, I was completely absorbed with trying to find out how Laura and all three of her babies died on the same day. What I lacked in experience, I made up for with enthusiasm, curiosity, and tenacity. The first thing I did was flip through the phone book and dial the number of the only Ash listed. It belonged to an elderly lady who had been married to George Brinson Ash, Jr. She told me the story of how her late husband had explained the deaths. As he told it, the whole family was sick with the flu. While her husband John slept, Laura got up in the middle of the night to give the children medicine and accidentally grabbed the wrong bottle, giving them strychnine instead. Technically, I had an answer, but it was at that point that my research began in earnest.

My quest to find out everything I could about the Ash family led me tramping through cemeteries, walking the streets of Savannah, touring churches and museums, turning pages in libraries and historical societies, handling documents in archives, scanning rolls of microfilm, and searching websites of data for any information connected to any member of the Ash family. Slowly but surely the mysteries unraveled themselves to reveal the story.

¹ Originally, I referred to Laura as a “girl.” At the time I first discovered Old Elam Cemetery, I was younger than she was when she died.

The day following their deaths, an article in the *Savannah Morning News* printed on July 25, 1871 describes the horrific scene as murder-suicide. While some of the details are a little murky, what is quite clear is that all four died very quick and painful deaths as a result of strychnine poisoning. Strychnine is one of the most bitter and lethal substances in the world. In 1871, it was almost completely unregulated and was common to most households where it was used to eliminate unwanted animals. Surprisingly, trace amounts of it existed in some medicines. Strychnine powerfully attacks the nervous system. The vivid description of the deaths of the children Ida, Sarah, and the baby George, followed by their mother Laura, portrays how the bodies of the victims bowed backwards in response to the poison in their blood streams.

Here again, I'd found another answer as to what happened to cause the deaths of John's family. In an attempt to understand what could bring someone to end their own life and the lives of their children so violently and abruptly, I still wanted to know more. Laura was a descendant of the Salzburgers, who settled in Savannah and Effingham County in 1734. Her maiden name was Dasher, and she came from a large, extended family of some of the first German settlers of Georgia. She married John Hergen Ash in 1866, following the end of the Civil War. The next line of inquiry was to find out more about her husband.

John Hergen Ash was born in 1843 in Savannah to George A. and Sarah Evans Burton Ash. This was the second marriage for each of his parents. The original Ash (Aschbocker) immigrant to the colony of Georgia was also a Salzburger, Matthias Ash. He was the great uncle of John H. Ash. The Ash family would have been considered upper middle class in Savannah during the early 1800s. They were builders, tailors,

speculators, and aldermen. John H. Ash attended Chatham Academy for high school in the late 1850s. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, John at the age of 17, promptly joined a Confederate cavalry regiment.

In a stroke of great luck for this research, John began keeping a series of journals in 1860 and continued writing them until nearly the end of the Civil War in 1865. All twenty are housed at Emory University, along with additional documents. This great source reveals much about John Ash. The journals also cover the era that this project will focus on. During the early years of the war, John was stationed near Savannah in a coast guard capacity. Despite the rigors of camp life, he managed to court and marry his first wife, Estella Powers of Whitesville, Georgia (now Guyton).

More than providing a view of military history, John's journals paint a rich portrait of life in Savannah during the Civil War. Living in military camps miles from the outskirts of the city, he described camp life and frequent trips to town to attend church, parties, and relax in his city home. From the mundane details of camp life to exciting elements of the social scene, John's journals provide an overview of his life and his surroundings. The surroundings include the existence of slavery; the ultimate reason the war was being fought. John frequently mentions enslaved people who belonged to his family and his friends. Most of the time, they fetched things for him from home. Occasionally, he visited "retired servants" in their homes. At times, John was annoyed with the servant of a friend who failed to prepare a meal to his satisfaction in camp.

During the later years of the war, John left Savannah. In 1864, while stationed near Atlanta, he received a letter that informed him his new bride had fallen very ill. He requested several days leave and set out on horseback for Whitesville, trading horses

along the way. When he arrived there, he thought that Estella was recovering from her illness. On the way back to Atlanta to rejoin his regiment, John recorded a dream of seeing a red cloud shaped like a coffin in the sky. Estella died on the date of that journal entry.

John's journals continue for a few months after that entry. He described the skirmishes that his regiment was involved in as they attempted to counter the strength of Sherman's invading army. As the war wound down, it was apparent that men were exhausted with battle. Many of them deserted and never came back to rejoin the fight. John held out to the end, though he frequently expressed his longing for a return to normal life.

A year after the end of the Civil War, he married Laura Dasher. By the time of the 1870 U.S. Federal Census, he was living in Effingham County. There he lived with his small family and prepared to join the ministry in the Baptist Church. In 1871, the tragedy visited his household. Following the publication of the article in the *Savannah Morning News*, presses nationwide picked up the story.

What began as a search to learn more about two specific people, John and Laura Ash, who lived in Effingham County, Georgia in the 1870s led to a much wider area of research. I quickly realized more was necessary to understand a specific event, like the tragedy that took place in a single household that dark night in July of 1871. The history of John's family in Savannah was also important.

Over the years of accumulating documents about all of the Ash people and my widening knowledge of Southern history, these people have come back to life in my mind. When I daydream I can clearly see them as they went about the business of living

their lives in early Savannah. All of the George's and John's, their wives and children, their friends, acquaintances, and servants - their world has a story to tell.

This thesis is mostly biographical in nature. Through the lives of John Ash and his wives, a larger story will be told. While writers of military history have sampled John Ash's journals several times, authors examining Savannah history have largely overlooked them. In doing so, they have ignored a wealth of material that provides insight into daily life. Learning the story of the Ash family opens a window into the past as everyday people lived it. The birth of the British colonies in the New World through the American Revolution can be told through the experiences of Matthias Ash and his neighbors, the Salzburgers. The antebellum years can be imagined through George and John Ash, our John's father and uncle. The richness of John's journals beautifully illustrates the Civil War. The experiences of John and his family after the war highlight the struggles and upheaval of life in the South during Reconstruction.

John's life provides all the elements of a good story: excitement, romance, tragedy, and heartbreak. He was forced to rebuild his destroyed life, not once, but twice. It has been said that art imitates life. Here, the goal is to take a family's life experience and weave their joys and sorrows into a narrative that will reflect their lives on its pages.

CHAPTER 2

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Matthias Ash

The Salzburger record is rich. John Ash and two of his wives descended from Salzburgers. So our story begins in the small Lutheran settlement of Ebenezer. Matthias Aschbocker was the first of the Ash family to emigrate from Germany to the newly formed colony of Georgia in 1734.² When he arrived in Georgia, he was a young man of seventeen years of age. The original Salzburger settlement, which became known as Old Ebenezer, lay about twenty-one miles upriver from Savannah. Hope swelled in the chests of the ship-bound settlers as they sailed for their new home. Sight unseen, they believed Old Ebenezer to be an oasis “with an abundance of rivers – low hills – brooks and cool springs and plenty of grass.”³ Where they were heading was no park-like setting. Amidst the jungle-like conditions of the unsettled interior of Georgia, the group struggled to hew a living from the stubborn ground. Clearing the land of trees was no easy task. Slavery was illegal in Georgia, but the Salzburgers had no qualms about accepting the help of enslaved men loaned to them by slaveholders from South Carolina. The group began to build small houses and plant crops.

Summer and winter at Old Ebenezer were rough for the little band of people who had fled an unpleasant religious climate in Germany, and now found themselves facing the uncomfortable elements of their new home. They had little time to recover from the

² Lindsey P. Henderson, Jr. “George H. Ash, Master Builder.” Class Paper, Armstrong Atlantic State University.

³ *The Beginning of the Salzburger Settlement Ebenezer in Georgia*. Translated from German Documents in Possession of the Georgia Salzburger Society. (Works Progress Administration of Georgia: 1937), von reck, March 7, 1734.

long voyage before they began their task of building a village. A combination of the hard work of constructing huts, sowing crops, and their exposure to the weather had weakened the settlers. Sickness began to winnow their numbers as men, women, and children succumbed to illness. Death became a common event among the Salzburger at Old Ebenezer. This was the environment where Matthias spent his formative years on the cusp of manhood.⁴

Exactly how long Matthias lived among the Salzburger in Ebenezer is unknown, but by the 1760s, he was living in Savannah. Thirty years after his arrival on a ship, he worked as a victualer, one who supplied food and other supplies necessary for the voyages of ships.⁵ By 1764, Matthias had purchased a lot in Savannah, where he applied for a license to run a tavern.⁶ As a tavern keeper in Savannah, he probably overheard all of the news in the town from the patrons who came in to drink at his bar. One of Matthias's good friends and business associates was Peter Tondee, who was also a young tavern owner in Savannah. The Sons of Liberty met at Tondee's Tavern in Savannah, which stood at the corner of Broughton and Whitaker Streets.⁷

Due to his early years in Ebenezer and his association with the Lutheran church there, Matthias must have felt an attachment to St. Matthew's Parish (now known as Effingham County). He petitioned for land throughout the 1700s, most interestingly a

⁴ *The Beginning of the Salzburger Settlement Ebenezer in Georgia*, a summary of the first year.

⁵ *Georgia Gazette*, September 15, 1763.

⁶ *Georgia Gazette*, January 19, 1764.

⁷ Carl Solana Weeks. *Savannah in the Time of Peter Tondee: The Road to Revolution in Colonial Georgia*. (Columbia, SC: Summerhouse Press, 1997) 141 & 170.

250-acre island in the Savannah River near Ebenezer. Hannah Gugel Ash, whom Matthias married late in life, also petitioned for more acreage.⁸ In his occupation as a planter, he owned slaves. What sort of master he may have been to the enslaved people who toiled on his land can only be imagined. In the *Georgia Gazette*, ads for runaway slaves were placed alongside those of stray horses. On at least one occasion Matthias placed an ad for a runaway, describing the escapee as “Peter [who] speaks little or no English.” Peter’s lack of fluency in the language of his captor indicates that he was a new import, either from Africa or the Caribbean. On other occasions, Matthias was listed as a contact for other runaways.⁹

George Adam Ash I

Later in life, Matthias may have aided his twenty-seven-year-old nephew, George Adam Aschbocker, in emigrating from Germany to what was by then the state of Georgia in the newly formed United States of America in 1790. Shortly after his arrival, George also adopted the Americanized version of his surname. In 1791, he placed an ad in the *Georgia Gazette* “respectfully informing the public” that he had opened a shop where he intended to work as a tailor and habit maker on Broughton Street in the block between Drayton and Abercorn streets. Speaking in the distinct language of the time, George “flattered himself to have it in his power to give entire satisfaction to those who may please to favor him with their commands.”¹⁰

⁸ Silas Emmett Lucas. *Index to the Headright and Bounty Grants of Georgia*. (Southern Historical Press, 1982).

⁹ *Georgia Gazette*. June 6, 1765, November 2, 1768, September 6, 1775.

¹⁰ *Georgia Gazette*, July 14, 1791.

The next few years were eventful ones for George. Soon after his arrival, he married a young, local woman, Susannah. Together they settled into their new lives in Savannah. The birth of their two sons took place only a few years apart. Their first son, John Hergen, was born in 1791. A few years later, Susannah gave birth to a second son, whom they named George Adam after his father. Susannah raised her two boys in the home that was shared with the family business.

As a new father, George struggled to make ends meet at his shop. In 1793, his name was published as one of the many who were in arrears on their property tax.¹¹ As his closest relative in Savannah, Matthias may have stepped in to intervene with a loan or a gift to his nephew. Almost certainly the connections, both personal and professional, that Matthias had made in his many years living in both Savannah and Effingham County were a benefit to George.

Life on Broughton Street must have been lively for the Ash family. Separated from the Bay by only a few blocks, houses and shops populated Broughton making the street both residential and business oriented. In 1797, George and Susannah obtained a new neighbor when they rented half of Lot 9 to the Clerk's Office of the Superior Court. This arrangement brought them extra income as well as increased traffic near the tailor shop.¹²

Whether George and Susannah enjoyed the hustle and bustle that surely took place in their home due to the combined house/shop aspect as well as the visitors that their new neighbor, the Clerk's Office, brought to the street can only be imagined. No

¹¹ *Georgia Gazette*, February 28, 1793.

¹² *Columbian Museum & Co*, May 23, 1797.

matter whether they found the change tedious or exciting, life was about to change for the worse. On Thursday, August 31, 1797, George died. While the cause of his death at the age of thirty-three is unknown, death at any age was not unusual during this time period.¹³

Left alone with two young sons to raise, Susannah wasted no time applying for administration of George's estate. When the appraisers arrived at the house on Broughton Street to value George's belongings, they listed the material items that were a part of George's daily life. (The total value of George Ash's estate was \$4,453.75, the current value would be \$84,100.¹⁴) One can imagine what George and Susannah's home may have been like based on the furnishings described in the probate record supplied to the court. There would have been a dining room brightened by candlelight and furnished with mahogany as well as accompanying china and silver. We can imagine George sitting at his mahogany desk wearing fashionable clothing, accented with silver shoe and knee buckles and a silver watch. He also owned pistols and a musket. The house would have been warmed by a fireplace or stove as evidenced by tools necessary for tending fire. The kitchen was stocked with the necessary accoutrements for cooking.¹⁵

George's estate included lots of silk and other fabrics, along with shears and other tools necessary for cutting and sewing the cloth into clothing. The contents of the house: furniture, tools, clothing, and personal items amounted to a value of \$831.75. An

¹³ *Georgia Gazette*, September 2, 1797.

¹⁴ <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php>. Given the difficulty of pre-fed currency complications, this is a best estimate of contemporary value.

¹⁵ *Georgia Gazette*, October 20, 1797.

assessment of George's day books and blotters show that at the time of his death, his clients owed him a sum of \$3,052. Last, but not least, listed among the items of value were three people: a woman named Wyner, a man named York, and a boy named July. The enslaved people in his estate were identified as slaves by the term "Negro." George may have brought the contents of his house with him to Savannah when he immigrated from Wurttemberg, or he may have purchased the furnishings for his house after he arrived and married Susannah. When it comes to the people he owned, it is certain that he acquired them after his arrival in the city.¹⁶

It is important to try to understand how and why George decided to purchase slaves while living in Savannah after he emigrated from Germany. Would someone who lived in the area of Wurttemberg in the eighteenth century have been familiar with slavery as a system or Africans in their own society? Slavery did not exist in Germany. However, Africans were present in Germany, and their cultural impact was much different there than in Georgia. Early modern Germans admired Africans as exotic and beautiful. Even though that worldview was much different than that of Americans, Matthias likely wrote letters to Wurtemberg describing his life which may have prepared George for the labor system of Georgia. Also, if Susannah was a native of Savannah, she would have influenced her husband's decisions.¹⁷

With that frame of reference in mind, let's contemplate what thought process George may have gone through when he arrived in Georgia. His uncle Matthias had lived in Savannah for several decades, and was a slaveholder in a society where slaveholding

¹⁶ George Ash Estate, 1797. Probate Court, Chatham County, Georgia.

¹⁷ Vera Lind. *Africans in Early Modern German Society: Identity – Difference – Aesthetics – Anthropology*. Bulletin of the GHI Washington. January 28, 2001.

was common. Did George spend time thinking about the morality of slavery? Was he religious? If so, did he believe it was a sin to own other people? Or, did he step off the ship onto the banks of the Savannah River and look around himself at a city that was largely operated by the labor of enslaved African Americans and decide slavery was a good idea? Did Matthias' life demonstrate to George that while it had been hard to carve a civilization out of wilderness, it was made infinitely easier by taking advantage of the unpaid labor of an enslaved class of people?

Aside from the moral decision of whether to utilize slave labor, there was the more practical matter of obtaining human property. He either bought the enslaved people at an auction or his uncle, Matthias, gave them to him when he arrived. Or maybe George came by the people he owned - Wyner, York, and July, respectively woman, man, and boy - when he married Susannah who was already a resident of Savannah. If this was the case, then his considerations might have included whether to make use of the labor or to emancipate the people. Possibly the people George held in slavery constituted a family unit on their own. If Wyner, York, and July were a family, they probably held their collective breath in fear when George died.

Often when heads of families died, the heirs were forced to auction slaves because their value would provide money to pay the outstanding debts of the deceased. Or if more than one person stood to inherit the estate, slaves could be divided among heirs in the same way other property was. Susannah and her minor sons were George's only heirs. Fortunately for both the enslaved people and the widow and her sons, the estate was not in debt, so no auction was necessary to settle debts.

After the death of George, Susannah was left alone with two young sons to raise: six-year-old John and four-year-old George. But she was hardly helpless. Susannah not only retained her home, but the help provided by Wyner, York, and July must have been invaluable to a widow raising a family alone in Savannah. If the three servants were a family unit, then they likely felt relief that they were allowed to stay together in a familiar home rather than being forced to make the adjustments necessary when sold to a new master.

Four years later in the winter of 1801, Susannah married again. A young carpenter, William Burnside, became a father figure to the young John and George.¹⁸ Those four years that Susannah lived on her own, in charge of her own household, must have nurtured a streak of independence in her. Even though she married again, she retained the property she inherited from George in her own name for nearly the rest of her life.¹⁹ William took his craft seriously. He petitioned, along with several other “House Carpenters” to incorporate “the Savannah House Carpenters.” In doing so, these artisans hoped to place “their craft upon a more respectable and social footing than heretofore, so that...[they] may be essentially benefitted and improved.”²⁰

A few months after Susannah and William married, Matthias Ash died on July 11, 1801. Susannah and her new husband William filed a caveat with the court on behalf of John and George Ash. It was natural for the parents to look out for the boys, as they were

¹⁸ *Georgia Gazette*. February 5, 1801.

¹⁹ Savannah, Georgia, Land Tax and Property Records, 1809-1938.

²⁰ Ulrich B. Phillips. *Plantation and Frontier, Vol. II: 1649-1863*. (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008), 371.

the only living blood relatives of Matthias in Georgia. Matthias and his wife, Hannah Gugel Ash, had no children. Despite the caveat, Hannah and her adult son, David Gugel inherited all of Matthias's property rather than allowing it to pass to his nephews.²¹

Only a few months later, in the spring of 1803, Hannah Ash invited the public to an auction to be held at the "Plantation of Matthias Ash" in Effingham County. There, all of Matthias's belongings would be sold. Listed among the furniture, tools, livestock, and miscellaneous things, were eighteen "negroes." These eighteen enslaved African Americans felt the usual anxiety when a master died. Georgia law considered these people as property to be bought and sold for any reason either an owner or an administrator of an estate felt necessary. The law left no room for the feelings of the enslaved. Matthias' death left the future uncertain for the people he held.²²

For some unknown reason, the enslaved people living on Matthias' plantation in Effingham County received a reprieve. The advertisement for the sale only ran in the newspaper for one week. Whatever the reason for the cancelation of the sale, it did not happen. Three years later, Hannah Gugel Ash died suddenly at the age of fifty-three.²³ With the death of Hannah, it would seem fair that Matthias' nephews, John and George would receive their inheritance of Matthias' property. In 1806, John and George were fifteen and thirteen, respectively. At this age, they were close enough to manhood to be looking towards their futures. The caveat that their mother and stepfather had filed on

²¹ *Columbian Museum & Savannah Daily Advertiser*, July 14, 1801; Jeannette Holland Austin. *Georgia Intestate Records*. (Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc. Baltimore, Maryland: 1995) p. 11.

²² *Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Advertiser*. March 5, 1802.

²³ Savannah, Georgia Vital Records, 1803-1966.

their behalf a few years earlier failed to sustain its goal of giving them a head start in life. Nevertheless, both George and John would manage to do well for themselves in Savannah. Later that year, David Gugel advertised again the sale that should have taken place at the Effingham plantation of Matthias, three years earlier. This time, Hannah's possessions were listed separately as part of the estate sale.²⁴

Death, once again, stole the husband and father of the Ash family. In the fall of 1808, Susannah's second husband and John and George's stepfather, William, died of consumption after being confined to his home for ten days. He was only thirty-one years old. John, now seventeen, and George, now fifteen, likely felt the loss of their second father quite severely. At the time of William's death, the family was living on Duke Street (now Congress Street). Susannah still held George's property on Broughton Street, and the rent from the lease of that property helped to sustain the family.²⁵

Following the death of her second husband, Susannah displayed extraordinarily good sense. Again, she retained the property of her deceased husband. After William's death, there were no sales advertised to clear up remaining debts. Year after year, Susannah's name is recorded in the city tax records of Savannah as she paid taxes on Lot 9, Third Reynolds Tithing Ward, the property where she had lived with George and given birth to their sons. Susannah continued to pay taxes on three lots in Percival Ward, where she lived for the rest of her life.²⁶

²⁴ *Columbian Museum & Savannah Daily Advertiser*. November 5, 1806.

²⁵ *The Code of the City of Savannah of 1907*. Savannah: Morning News Print, 1907.

²⁶ *Savannah, Georgia, Land Tax and Property Records, 1809-1938* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

When John and George came to adulthood, their mother did not immediately divide the Reynolds Ward lot for her sons to share. She may have assisted them in beginning their careers and allowed them use of the property. John followed in his stepfather's steps and became a master builder, while George returned to his father's craft and made a living as a tailor. George and John both married and became fairly prominent in Savannah. While they would not hold the great wealth of the planters, they were not poor by any means. They both prospered in their chosen careers. Later, in 1817, Susannah transferred the Broughton Street lot to her sons. In the transfer, the narrow lot was divided into an Eastern and Western portion. Each son received half. There are currently two small buildings on the lot, so there may well have been two or more buildings on the lot at the time.²⁷

Several years later in the spring of 1826, Susannah Ash Burnside, at the age of fifty-eight died at her home on York Street in Percival Ward. Her body was laid to rest in the city cemetery. As well as successfully raising two sons to adulthood and giving them a propertied start in life, she had also remained financially independent. This was an unusual feat for a woman living in the nineteenth century.²⁸

²⁷ City of Savannah, Georgia Records – Tax Register.

²⁸ City of Savannah, Georgia Records – Health Department, Vital Statistics Registers, Savannah, Georgia: City of Savannah.

John Hergen Ash I

By 1809 when John was eighteen years old, he had joined the Republican Blues and served as First Sergeant for his company.²⁹ As the oldest son, he probably still lived at home with his mother and sixteen-year-old brother, George. But, it wouldn't be long before he started his own family when he married Sarah Norton.

As a newly minted adult, John performed his first act of civil service soon after his twenty-first birthday when he was chosen to serve as a Grand Juror by the Inferior Court of Chatham County in 1812.³⁰ He also continued to serve in the Republican Blues, but he had been promoted to lieutenant by this point. A year later in 1813, John was acting as secretary for the Mechanic Society.³¹ No doubt the lengthy history of his family in Georgia, his military service, and his civic engagement had well prepared him for his next step.

In November of 1814, a press release announced his candidacy for a position on the board of alderman in the city election. "If ardent patriotism, intelligence, and firmness are qualifications essential in a public character . . . John H. Ash . . . eminently deserves, and it is therefore expected he will receive the undivided support of the republican interest of our city at the election."³² His candidacy was successful. Two weeks later, the published minutes show him working on a committee within the city council.³³

²⁹ *Republican, And Savannah Evening Ledger*, May 4, 1809.

³⁰ *Republican, And Savannah Evening Ledger*, July 28, 1812.

³¹ *Republican, And Savannah Evening Ledger*, November 23, 1813.

³² *Republican, And Savannah Evening Ledger*, November 3, 1814.

³³ *Republican, And Savannah Evening Ledger*, November 19, 1814.

While his involvement in so many different sectors of Savannah society were crucial to being elected as alderman, something else seems to be at play here. There comes along once in a while, a shining star among a generation of young men. John must have possessed that special something that invited the respect and admiration of others. It is true that both men and women transitioned into adult roles at an earlier age in the 1800s due to both the expectations of society and the brevity of a lifespan. However, that alone does account for John's early level of success. As an official serving on the board of alderman, John worked alongside men who were far more educated and who had acquired more years of experience than he held.

In his role on the Board of Alderman, John worked closely with Robert Mackay and John Morel. His political associations went hand in hand with his career as a master builder. In the summer of 1815, John joined with James Morris to create a firm of their own.³⁴ Things were going very well for him in both politics and business. John and his wife, Sarah, were living on his half of Lot 9, Third Tithing, Reynolds Ward where he had been born. By that time, his younger brother George was also married and living next door to him. John and Sarah were parents to an eighteen-month-old son, whom they had named James. The proud new parents may have named their baby in honor of John's business partner. Sadly, the baby became suddenly ill and died.³⁵

The following year, 1816, John was still working with James Morris. In addition to building new homes for Savannahians to live in, they also did repair jobs. The

³⁴ *Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger*, July 18, 1815.

³⁵ Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia.

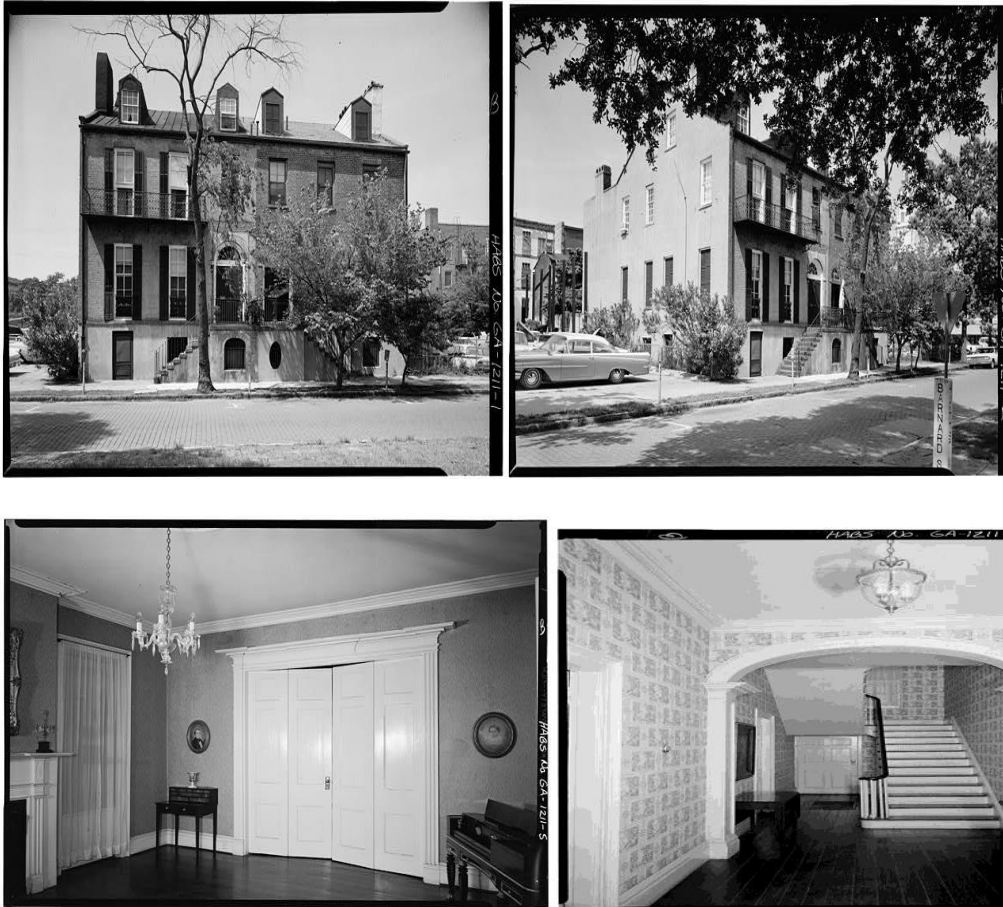
Savannah Female Asylum paid the two carpenters \$19.23 for repairs to the asylum lot.³⁶

John's responsibilities were many. He was a husband and the eldest son of a mother who had been twice widowed and had not remarried. His civic duties as a city alderman occupied much of his time. John still served in the Republican Blues military regiment. His work in partnership with Morris provided his livelihood.

Life for John and his wife Sarah didn't just revolve around John's business and political positions. Using his skills as a builder, John constructed a new home for his small family at 114-116 West Hull Street. Jackson Ward was designed in 1815, a freshly laid-out ward, with Orleans Square in the middle meant to commemorate General Andrew Jackson's success at the Battle of New Orleans. Nestled within the new ward, John laid out and built his Federal style, double townhome. A significant step away from John's roots on Broughton Street, he and Sarah must have been excited to move into such a roomy and elegant home.³⁷ Despite the loss of James, they were still young and thoughts of filling the rooms with the patter of little footsteps must have still occupied the married couple as they furnished their new abode.

³⁶ *Savannah Republican*, December 31, 1816.

³⁷ <http://www.loc.gov/item/ga0149>. Accessed August 28, 2015.



John H. Ash House 114-116 West Hull Street (Library of Congress)

John must have been likeable and outgoing as he went about his business in Savannah because he was able to enmesh himself in the social scene of the town. In February of 1817, John served on a committee to organize entertainment for a two-fold celebration. The first event the citizens of Savannah wished to celebrate was the Fourth of March, an annual commemoration of the first meeting of the Congress of the United States when the Constitution became effective in 1789. President James Monroe's first inauguration was the second cause for celebration. Two months before the president's scheduled arrival, the council of alderman selected John Ash along with Charles Harris

and Thomas Usher Pulaski “T.U.P.” Charleton to plan the entertainment for Monroe’s visit.³⁸

At this ball, the city of Savannah enjoyed its position within the very young, twenty-eight-year-old republic. John, a twenty-six-year-old celebrant at the ball, was even younger. His first experience participating in the planning of a public event prepared him for a more prominent role in future social occasions.³⁹

Many years later best-selling author, Eugenia Price, recreated the ball where John and his wife danced with the other attendees. In *Savannah*, Price depicts a ball scene where John and his wife, “Mr. and Mrs. Ash,” are at the home of the English architect, William Jay. On the pages she has her fictional character, Mark, dance with Mrs. Ash. Afterwards he remarked to a friend with approval of her incredible lightness of foot despite her well-rounded figure.

Early in 1818, John took two of his clients, Benjamin and Abraham Sheftall to court. The Sheftalls had failed to pay John for work he had performed for them. To satisfy the debt, one of their properties was auctioned off at the City Sheriff’s sale. Isaac D’Lyon describe the lot as the land and improvements on Lot 40 in Elbert Ward, which was situated on the corner of Jefferson and Liberty streets. The debt must have been substantial one to have required a sale of property this size.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Savannah Daily Republican*, March 12, 1819.

³⁹ *Savannah Republican*, February 27, 1817.

⁴⁰ *Daily Savannah Republican*, January 3, 1818.

Pursuing debts through the legal system requiring the sale of property, both land and human, was common to the citizens of Savannah. John initiated and was named in several cases of outstanding debt. Given the close ties that John shared with the Sheftalls and others, one wonders if hard feelings lingered after the settlement of these debts. It could also have been that these issues happened so frequently that it was a regular way of doing business.

Later in 1818, John again served on the Grand Jury. During the session, he and the others who served began by praising both Savannah and its place within the nation as a whole.

The unparalleled prosperity of our country, the commercial and political importance it has so rapidly attained, are surely the best evidences that can be afforded of the blessings of a happy constitution, of laws wisely framed and administered, and of the peculiar benefits resulting from such a form of government, as that under which it is our pride and happiness to live, and of which we only can boast.

But, while our hearts expand with gratitude to heaven for our national and individual prosperity, we would call upon the administrators of our laws to be watchful and vigilant in the discharge of their duty, as the most efficient means of preserving unto us and our children the blessings we enjoy.⁴¹

What followed this high praise was a compilation of complaints about things happening in Savannah that they considered unseemly. A partial summation of that list reveals much about what it was like to be a resident of a small but growing city. The list is lengthy. Trash piled up inconveniently in public places. At night, without sufficient light to see, one walking the public streets or lanes might trip over mounds of rubbish. More than a few of the articles discussed the issue of sights and smells of trash and the hazards they caused, yet to these men, the offensive odor was only a “nuisance.”

⁴¹ *Daily Savannah Republican*, January 17, 1818.

“Shouting and ball playing” on the Sabbath disturbed them. They “regretted” that the city’s courthouse was not bigger to more adequately serve the population and to allow the wealth of the city to be on display. These problems seemed to pale in comparison as they took up the next set of issues.

The most serious complaints the Grand Jury presented were those in reference to the enslaved population who lived alongside them within the close ranks of the city. “We present as an evil of much importance,” the men grumbled, “the non-execution of the ordinances, predicated particularly, upon the patrol laws of the state, such as relate to the convention of negroes in large numbers, at any time and at all times.” Here the agitation of the Grand Jury is hard to decipher. It could be that the laxity of the implementation of the patrol laws contributed to the anxiety that white citizens in slave states felt.

Slaveholders had much to be anxious about. The colony of Saint Domingue had erupted into violence in 1793. Amidst the political swirl of revolution with its mother country across the Atlantic in France, local leadership on the island quarreled amongst itself. In this vacuum, an army of African soldiers rose up. These fierce warriors who were previously enslaved by French masters forcefully seized their freedom. Long abused by an oppressive regime, they felt little empathy as they fought to retain the liberty they had seized for themselves. In response, their French masters, both white and “gens de colour,” fearing for their lives, desperately boarded any sailing vessel they could and took flight. Taking their families and their slaves with them, they sought refuge in the United States. A small portion of these French refugees quickly found asylum in Savannah. A decade later, a third wave of immigrants also made their way to the city after they were

rejected by other American states.⁴²

American slaveholders and other whites who lived among free and enslaved people of color were terrified by the prospect that such an insurrection could take place within their own societies. This resulted in rumors of imagined conspiracies of insurrection by frightened and paranoid slaveholders who feared that the people they enslaved might be planning to kill them as they slept in their beds. Paranoia often turned out to be unfounded, but the success of a handful of rebellious plots fanned the flames of white fear.

The complaint of the lack of properly enforced patrols in Savannah in 1818 fell between several discoveries of these plots. So, while the Grand Jury could have been continuing in the tradition of fear of violence as the jurors lived in a small city with a sizeable population of enslaved people, they also could have been just exaggerating the annoyance they felt at the sight of people of color congregating in public areas. In their sense of racial superiority, they felt that the city was built by and for people of European descent, not for biracial or African free and enslaved people. It was likely a mixture of both fear and annoyance, especially in light of the following grievance they expressed.

“We present as an evil of great magnitude” they began again, “the ordinance granting badges to colored and black women, for the purpose of hawking about articles for sale.” This duality of description was intentional. When the men used the word “colored,” it signified that they recognized these women as biracial or “mulatto” in the

⁴² Jeremy Popkin. *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Ashli White. *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

term that they would have recognized. What they probably meant to convey with this distinction, is that the biracial women were more likely than those of a darker hue to be free.

The Grand Jury huffed, “These women monopolize in divers [numerous] ways many of the necessities of life, which are brought to our market, by which the price is greatly enhanced, and the poor inhabitants of our city proportionally distressed.” The men were saying two things, one intentionally, and the other not quite as clearly. First, they resented the sway, however insignificant, that these female sellers of goods held within the local economy. As the women (free and enslaved) entered the city market each day with eggs and produce to sell from their baskets, white men and women walked through the streets to buy from them. In these necessary purchases, the women of color held a small amount of power over the transactions in which they and their white customers engaged. Secondly, the men expressed sympathy for their poor, white neighbors who might not be able to afford to purchase the wares the women sold. As slaveholders, they could not afford to lose the support of non-elite whites due to competition with African Americans within the city.

This was a great problem, they emphasized, “[Women of color engaging in the marketplace] encourage thefts, deprave our domestics, and by their evil influence and dissolute lives endanger the safety of our city.” What they meant here was that when the servants who worked in so many homes in Savannah saw the entrepreneurship of these women, they felt envious. The women who worked the market managed to accumulate a little money and/or property of their own, while unpaid servants felt disgruntled with their own role. Working as a domestic under the watchful eyes of the masters allowed

them little time for themselves. Also, because these servants were within their homes, their discontent could lead them to pilfer household items. The Grand Jury suggested the solution of repealing the sale of badges to the women so that their access to the market would be restricted.⁴³

Consider these men who were so educated as to properly use the English language with such expressiveness and how they lived their lives. They all held slaves or if they did not own slaves themselves, they rented enslaved people from other slaveholders for use in their trade or as household servants. These citizens lived in a city built on the backs of enslaved labor since Savannah's inception in 1733. Yet, they felt perfectly comfortable expressing more than mild annoyance at the sight of African-Americans within their city. John and his compatriots wanted their servants to be out of sight in both the public and social sphere except for when they were working.

John served as a city alderman for several more terms, and he continued applying his skill to planning events within Savannah. One of his lasting contributions came as he led a group that endeavored to find the burial place of Nathaniel Greene. John also enjoyed an illustrious career as a builder. Many of the houses he planned and constructed in Savannah still stand. Perhaps his last and most extensive building project still survives, his home at 114-116 West Hull Street.⁴⁴

On the surface, it seemed as if John and Sarah had it all. The couple had a new home and in February of 1821, their new baby girl, Sarah was born. But something

⁴³ *Daily Savannah Republican*, January 17, 1818.

⁴⁴ Roulhac Toledano. *The National Trust Guide to Savannah*. (New York: Preservation Press, 1997) 137. Walter Charlton Hartridge also lived here.

turned. That same year, even as John worked to distribute food to the poverty stricken citizens of Savannah, legal notices began appearing in the pages of the newspaper. He owed his creditors, and they intended to collect. In an effort to cover his losses, he decided to sell either his inherited property on Broughton Street or his newly built home on West Hull Street.⁴⁵

When John died an early death in 1822 of bilious fever at the age of 30, his estate was divided to settle his debts. His wife and two daughters left the Hull street house and lived on Indian street. Sarah, his infant daughter, grew to be “the light of a mother’s eye.” When she died at the tender age of thirteen in 1834, it must have been a great blow to her mother and her sister Susan. Her obituary carried this sentiment, “Mourn not then mother, sisters, brother, friend, but indulge the joyful assurance that your loss is her eternal gain.”⁴⁶

Within a couple of years, Sarah, John’s widow became sick. For the next nine months, she suffered and prepared for her death. At the age of forty-five, on her death bed, she had tried to hold onto life for the sake of her remaining daughter Susan who tended to her needs. At last she could no longer hold on, and she surrendered to death.⁴⁷

Two decades after John’s death, with the birth of his nephew in 1843, his name would carry on.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Savannah Daily Republican*, January 2, 1822.

⁴⁶ *Georgian*, March 19, 1834.

⁴⁷ *Georgian*, June 23, 1836.

⁴⁸ This section will be expanded later to incorporate more of John’s life.

George Adam Ash II

In February of 1814, one day after Valentine's Day, twenty-one-year-old George Adam Ash, II married Eliza Gorham. Connecticut-born Eliza was a Mayflower descendant. Like his father before him, George became a tailor in Savannah to support his family. He operated in a shop on the Bay and wasted no time expanding his business. In 1815, he formed a partnership with Willis Gorham, and they moved their shop to Broughton Street. George took out an ad to inform Savannahians of his business expansion. At the same time, he invited journeymen to apply for employment with him. He gradually transitioned from tailoring to merchant/speculator and accumulated quite a bit of wealth.⁴⁹

The following year in 1816, George dissolved his partnership with Gorham. However, he did not get out of the tailoring business. Two years later, he again advertised that his shop was moving. This time he became neighbors with the *Savannah Republican*. George joined his brother John in serving with the Republican Blues. He was also active in civic life with service on the Board of Health for Reynolds Ward. Sometime after John's death in 1822, George was also elected to the Board of Aldermen.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Jordan Dodd. Georgia Marriages to 1850 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1997; Henderson, "George H. Ash, Master Builder;" *Republican, and Savannah Evening Ledger*, November 28, 1815.

⁵⁰ *Savannah Republican*, July 16, 1816; *Daily Savannah Republican*, August 15, 1818; *Georgian*, May 19, 1818.

George and Eliza began to have children. Their children were: Charles Burnside Ash born in 1821, Susannah Burnside Ash born in 1825, Georgia Ann Gorham Ash born in 1827, George H. Ash born in 1828, Eugenia Rosamond Ash born in 1830, and William Rahn Ash born in 1832. Of these, Georgia Ann and Eugenia died as infants.

George was left alone with the surviving children to raise when forty-five-year-old Eliza died in 1839 of apoplexy (stroke).⁵¹ As was the custom of the time, he began to look for another wife to maintain his household. He married again in January of 1842, this time to Sarah Evans Burton.⁵² Sarah, a widow, also had two daughters from that marriage. Only a few days before George and Sarah married, George's nine-year-old son, William Rahn, drowned in the Savannah River.⁵³

In their second year of marriage, Sarah bore a son, John Hergen Ash. Three years later, John was blessed with a little sister, Sarah Evans Ash. In 1849, when John was six years old, his three-year-old sister, Sarah became ill. His beloved sister, named for his mother's namesake died of inflammation of the bowels. Sarah's death deeply impacted John. As he grieved the loss of his baby sister and observed the grief of his parents over the loss of a child, the loss made an impression on him that he never forgot. As an adult, when he chose to go into the ministry, he cited her death, and his admiration of his mother's faith as influencing him to turn to the church.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia.

⁵² Georgia Marriages 1826 through 1850.

⁵³ Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia.

⁵⁴ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*. (Compiled for the Christian index. Atlanta, GA. 1881) 12.

While John Hergen Ash II continued his uncle's name, it is through George H. Ash, John's older brother, that the first John Hergen Ash's legacy as a builder continued. George H.'s building was quite prolific and several of the homes he built also survive. Historians of the city and its architecture have neglected the Ash family's contribution to Savannah in terms of both buildings and culture.

When George II died in May of 1861, the *Savannah Republican* lamented this loyal subscriber's passing by noting that at the age of 68 he was one of the oldest citizens in Savannah. He'd taken the paper for more than forty years. His sons Charles and George invited friends and family to his Taylor Street home to be with them in their time of grief and to honor the bereaved.⁵⁵

While George's wife and children gathered to mourn his loss with those who came to pay their respects, their thoughts must have included what would become of his estate. They were his family but also his heirs. The children from his first marriage to Eliza Gorham were his daughter, Susannah Burnside Patterson (recently widowed) and his two sons, George H. and Charles B. Also included were his second and current wife, Sarah, and their son John. The final heir was Benjamin Grovenstein, the husband of Mary Burton Ash (child from Sarah's first marriage), whom George II had adopted when he and Sarah married. Each heir would receive a sixth of his estate.

As the probate of George II's estate showed, he had managed to accumulate much more material wealth than his father had. George I had crossed the Atlantic Ocean in order to build a new life in the fledgling Georgia colony. By the time of his early death in 1797, he had succeeded in creating a firm foundation for his son, George II to build upon.

⁵⁵ *Savannah Republican*, May 27, 1861.

Susannah, George II's mother held the Reynolds Ward lots, three enslaved people, and cash owed to George I's estate. When George II and John I became adults, she granted the lots to her sons. After George II's brother, John I, died in 1821 and his mother, Susannah died in 1827, George's only family in Savannah was his wife Eliza. In his two marriages, George created his own immediate family to form a small network in the city. During his lifetime, he also managed to build a substantial nest egg to pass on to each heir after he was gone.

The sum total of George's estate as listed in the probate record was \$37,293. A current equivalent value would be \$786,000. Little of this estate, however, consisted of cash assets. The federal style town home on Taylor Street that Sarah and John were sharing with George at the time of his death, as well as all its contents were included in the value of the estate and were not exempt from being shared with the other heirs.⁵⁶

In addition to the Taylor Street property, the two lots in Reynolds Ward on Broughton Street that George I had originally purchased and that George II and John I grew up in were also included. Also, two lots and houses on Liberty Street in Troup Ward were part of the estate. The lots and houses in Savannah as well as about 700 acres that George owned in other Georgia counties made up about one-third of the value of the estate.

George's personal effects - his clothes, his cane, his watches, his spectacles, and his guns made up only a small portion of the value of the estate. Estate records indicate that when George II died, he still held trinkets that he inherited from his father. George was very young when his father died, and keeping his father's guns and watch must have

⁵⁶ <http://www.measuringworth.com>. Accessed August 19, 2015.

helped him to feel closer to the father he lost. In addition to George's things, all of the bedroom and living furniture and the contents of the kitchen that filled the Taylor Street home were appraised. A piano, window shades, carpets, and even the mantles that made the home George, Sarah, and John shared comfortable were included. These combined with stock that he owned in the Central of Georgia Railroad and the Savannah Gas Light Company and \$600 in cash made up another third of the estate.⁵⁷

Enslaved members of the 'peculiar institution' of slavery made up the remaining third of the estate. Twenty-four people, both male and female, ranging from infants to adults of fifty-five years of age were members of George's household. The 1860 slave schedule that was collected as part of the U.S. Federal Census of 1860, supplements the information collected in the probate of George's estate. These two documents combined provide a peek at the enslaved people that served the Ash family.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The author has been informed that some of the items listed in the probate are still in the possession of the Ash family (Donna Ash Suter).

⁵⁸ George A. Ash Estate Probate. July 12, 1861.

Their names, in the order they were listed on the probate inventory, were as follows:

Nicholas
 Charles
 Zeddock
 Meshack
 Hezekiah
 Dolly
 Phillis
 Mary (P.D.)
 Nelly (P.D.)
 Daniel (P.S.)
 Ann
 Catharine Potter
 Elsey & infant
 Nanny
 Rose
 Jim (R.S.)
 Amelia & infant
 Joseph (A.S.)
 Mary (A.D.)
 Sally
 Catharine (Sally child)
 Wylly (on C.R. Road)
 Rose (little)
 Ellen & infant.

The abbreviations following some of the names likely indicated who their mothers were. For instance, Mary, Nelly, and Daniel were the children of Phillis. Joseph and Mary were the children of Amelia. Jim was Rose's son. The notation "little" following the second Rose listed may have been an indication that one Rose was older than the other, not necessarily a familial connection. Of note, is the "Potter" following the first Catharine listed. This was either an inclusion of her surname or a clue as to what her skills were.

Three slave houses were recorded in the 1860 slave schedule. If the upper floor of the carriage house behind the home on Taylor Street was included as one of those houses, then it is possible that some of the slaves lived away from the home in housing that

provided them some distance from the master's house. Wylly most likely lived away from home in his work on the railroad. George probably allowed Wylly to keep a small portion of the pay he earned to provide board for himself.⁵⁹

Each person enslaved by the Ash family performed duties that enriched the lives of George, Sarah, and John. The tasks that the servants worked on each day made life for the masters more comfortable. Whether they were rented out, like Wylly, to labor for those who did not own slaves themselves and provided cash flow for George, or whether they did work such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, or caring for the livestock of the Ash home, their use meant more leisure for the three inhabitants of the Taylor home.

Now, with the division of George's wealth, the twenty-four people that he owned were appraised and listed on a document to be divided between his heirs. Life changes of white slaveholders deeply affected the lives of those they held. The death of a master was often something to be feared, as it might bring the most disruptive of changes for the enslaved. The act of assigning legal ownership of George's human property to his widow or children might not disrupt the slaves' lives quite as abruptly as would a plantation owner selling or parceling out the enslaved people he held. Still, it was a significant adjustment in the day-to-day lives of those who would no longer be part of the primary Ash household.

The court divided George's property into six approximately equal units. Each heir received a portion of each form of property (real estate, human property, and cash or shares) in his or her assigned lot. Susannah Burnside Patterson, George's oldest daughter, received the first lot. The western half of the Reynolds Ward lot on Broughton

⁵⁹ John H. Ash Collection. MSS 12, August 2, 1860.

Street that her father had inherited from his father, along with the building that existed on it, was included in her lot. Nicholas, along with Elsey and Ellen and their babies, were also given to her. Shares of the Central of Georgia Railroad Company and the Savannah Gas Light Company completed Susannah's inheritance.

John inherited the eastern portion of the Reynolds Ward lot. George had assumed ownership of his brother John I's lot after his death in 1821. Named after the uncle he never met, John now held his property. Phillis and her three children, Mary, Nelly, and Daniel, along with Ann and Meshack, now belonged to John. He also received shares of the stock his father owned before his death. Sarah, his mother and guardian would pay the taxes on his property until 1865.

Benjamin Grovenstein, the husband of John's half sister Mary Burton Ash Grovenstein, inherited the western half of the Troup Ward lot on Liberty Street, along with the house situated there. Amelia and her children Joseph and Mary, as well as Wylley, now belonged to him. Benjamin also received an equitable share of the stock in the railroad and gas light companies.

George H. Ash, a builder like his uncle John, had built the house his father lived in only five years earlier. His inheritance was the eastern half of the Troup Ward lot on Liberty Street and the house on it. Charles, Catharine, Nanny, and Zaddock went to him. Likewise, he received a portion of the stock that remained.

Charles, the other son from George's first marriage with Eliza, inherited the western half of the Taylor Street townhouse. He had already been living there. In essence he received the ownership of his home. Hezekiah, Dolly, and Rose (little) were given to him to complete his portion. Shares of stock rounded out his inheritance.

Lastly, Sarah received and continued to live in the eastern half of her Taylor Street home she had shared with her husband. Sally, Catharine, Rose, and her son, Jim, continued on with Sarah. Their lives were the least affected by George's death, as far as a change in living arrangements. Phillis, her children, Ann, and Meshack would have also stayed because Sarah was John's guardian. However, they may have experienced an increase in tasks.

While it does not appear that the heirs separated mothers from their children in this division of the estate, the record also does not necessarily indicate that the enslaved families remained intact. It is impossible to know if the men of the estate included in the family units of mothers and children. Because of the freedom of mobility that urban slavery enjoyed over rural or plantation slavery, it could also be that the fathers were held by different households within the city.

The probate of George's estate leaves a significant question unanswered: how did he accumulate his wealth, especially his human property? As late as 1829, he was paying taxes on only two slaves. Yet in the 1850 U.S. Census, that number had increased to nineteen people. When he died in 1861, the probate of his estate showed that he owned twenty-four people. This was only a small discrepancy from the previous year's census record, which showed twenty-six people in his household. In great contrast, he paid taxes on only eight slaves in 1861. Even taking into consideration the age exemptions for taxes owed, the numbers don't align. A cursory comparison on a handful of slaveholders in Savannah showed the same discrepancy between census and property tax records. One explanation may be that most of the slaves George owned may have been rented out, and the renter paid the taxes. However, given the debate in Congress when changes were

proposed to the information collected on the slave population for the 1850 U.S. census, it's not a stretch to believe that slaveholders were consistently underreporting the number of slaves they owned for tax purposes.

Whatever the explanation for the discrepancies in the paperwork, in just over twenty years, George went from owning a very small number of slaves to becoming a moderate slaveholder in the urban environment of Savannah. Something in his financial life shifted dramatically. He went from being the orphaned son of a German immigrant who left a small amount of property for him and his brother to share, to a man of advanced age who left a substantial amount of property for his six heirs. A powerful clue to how he accumulated nearly a hundred thousand dollars in assets to pass on to his children can be found in the makeup of those assets. Slavery was more than a form of forced, captive labor. Slavery was also capital. Each person owned provided collateral for more financial gain.

Slowly but surely George's identity as a slaveholder grew. When he inherited slaves by the death of family members, purchased slaves in the market, or received slaves due to a default on a debt that a client owed, his wealth increased. The labor he extracted from each person he owned was labor that he did not have to perform himself or pay someone else to do. More than that, each person was an investment whose value allowed for further financial growth.

As a Savannah businessman steeped in the slaveholding culture of the South, owning slaves made perfect sense to George. In contrast to his father, who was introduced to slavery as an institution only as an adult, George was born into a household where servants worked alongside his mother and stepfather. He grew up in a city built

upon the backs of those who were forced to toil for those who legally held them in bondage. Slave auctions and sales were a common sight on the streets of Savannah as city residents both bought and sold their human property. The sights and sounds of slavery permeated George's formative and adult world.

While the men, women, and children that George came to own as a businessman added to his wealth, their lives were deeply intertwined with those of the Ash family. More than just names on a document, the people listed as George's property, and as an inheritance to his wife and children, had lives of their own. Each man and woman experienced sorrows and joys, wept and laughed, worried and hoped, and grieved and rejoiced in the same ways that made them just as human as their white masters. There were parents and children, friends and lovers, allies and enemies. Their stories are not as easy to trace as those of the Ash family, but they are still important.

Fleshing the enslaved characters out beyond just their names, genders, and ages to include their lives in tandem with the Ash narrative has proved to be difficult. The very nature of slavery as an institution often served to hide the humanity of the people it enslaved. The paucity of documentary evidence that provides an overview of the lives of those who lived in the past reflects that illusion. However, a patchwork of connected documents provides hints into their lives.

The availability of Inward and Outgoing Slave Manifests of Savannah gives a little insight into George's business practices and also to the lives of two of the women he held. In the outgoing slave manifests, George's name is listed twice as being the owner of slave cargo bound for New York from Savannah. When a slave traveled, the owner had to sign an oath ensuring that person had not been imported after January of 1808. Human

trafficking was far more common from Savannah to other Southern ports, both inland and coastal. Yet, an analysis of the data from the manifests indicates a surprising frequency in enslaved passengers to northern ports such as New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania.

In 1821, one of the passengers on board the brig *Levant* was a 12-year-old girl named Abbey. She must have been accompanying George to New York, because she returned to Savannah a few months later. What purpose could a child serve on what was most likely a trip to purchase fabric for use in George's tailoring shop? This was the same year that George's first child, Charles was born after seven years of marriage to Eliza. If Eliza and the baby also traveled with George to New York, Abbey likely came along to help as a nurse. It is also conceivable that George was training Abbey to assist in the tailoring business. However, Abbey is not one of the people listed in the probate of his estate when George died in 1860. She would have been 51 if she had lived until then.⁶⁰

On a similar voyage eight years later in 1829, there was a second passenger that sailed on the ship *Emperor*. Nanny was a 30-year-old woman that the manifest described as "yellow." As much as I have scoured the manifests for a hint that she returned, there is no further reference to her in its pages. There are a couple of different scenarios that could have played out.⁶¹

On the page where Nanny's passage is recorded on the manifest, at the top in pre-printed type is "Slave Manifest - Sold by W.T. Williams." But this was also listed at the top of Abbey's manifest, and her return to Savannah indicated that she had not been sold. By the time Nanny traveled to New York in 1829, slavery had been abolished in New

⁶⁰ Manifest of Slaves, Passengers on board the Brig, *Levant*, June 15, 1821. Manifest of Slaves intended to be transported on board the Sloop, *Channey*, October 20, 1821.

⁶¹ Manifest of Slaves, Passengers of board the Ship, *Emperor*, June 16, 1829.

York. This makes the likelihood of her having been sold even more unlikely. Another explanation is that, like Abbey, Nanny accompanied George on a trip North. However, unlike Abbey, Nanny did not return to Savannah. While there, she could have escaped and blended into the population of free people of color living in the city. A third less likely possibility, is that George manumitted her and sent her North on her own. Or, she may have died of illness while in New York and been buried there.

New York City, in 1830, was the first city in the United States to surpass the 200,000 population mark. The contrast between New York as a metropolitan area and Savannah as a small town could not have been more pronounced. For Nanny, Abbey, and the hundreds if not thousands of other enslaved men and women being taken back and forth from Southern States to Northern states, the journeys must have been eye opening expansions of their worlds. Northern states where other African Americans lived in freedom must have tempted Southern enslaved people to make a dash for their own freedom.

While it may not seem important or relevant to include these tidbits of information, they are like flashes of gold in a pan. Mining for scraps of information on the people whose lives of work, sacrifice, and hardship form the bedrock of this country is time not wasted. Why is it relevant to include fragments of snapshots of the lives of those that the Ash family enslaved? Without the labor of slaves, the lives of the Ash family, other Southern slaveholding families, and indeed, the fabric of the United States would not have existed as it did.

It is impossible to write a history of a slaveholding family without including what can be discovered of the slaves that they held. To do so would be disingenuous. In antebellum life, there did not exist two separate spheres, one for white inhabitants and one for people of color. Their lives were intermeshed, tightly entangled, one dependent upon the other. In fact, the lives of slaves were very often at the mercy of the master.

More than one hundred and fifty years later, the irreparable harm of slavery cannot be undone. The ramifications of slavery still echo through our society today. If the only written history we can find of the rich and full lives that African Americans lived, is their names on the tattered papers in an archive, then let their names be said.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN HERGEN ASH II: PRE-CIVIL WAR

Yellow Fever

June 2016

Heat rose from the South Carolina road. Hot air collected under the low floor of the black Miata and seeped upwards making the floor mats warm to the touch. The poorly maintained state road made for a bumpy ride in the low roadster. My heart beat faster in anticipation tempered by a little anxiety. The day had finally come. Donna, a descendant of John and Lula was visiting her son Ben in Charleston. She'd brought all of John's papers she had inherited from her family and invited me to come look at them with her.

More than a decade had passed since I'd begun researching John's story after becoming consumed with curiosity when I discovered his final resting place. In a time before the internet had fully developed search capability, it took more than a year to find that John's journals were housed at Emory University, but many more years had led to this moment of discovery.

When I knocked at the door of Ben's home, his two large dogs greeted me at the door. He introduced me to his little boy and girl, his wife, and his mother, Donna. After a bit of chit-chat, the family headed out for a shopping trip leaving Donna and me to look through the papers.

One of the things I'd been the most excited about reading was John's essay book from his school boy days. In it I expected to meet the boy who became the young man I already knew from reading his years of journals. Flipping through the book of essays and

his copies of literature and poems, I found a small sheet of paper folded and stuck between two pages.

Written at the height of the yellow fever epidemic of 1854, John never mailed the note due to fears of contagion. If he had mailed the note, I likely would have never had the chance to read it. Nestled between the pages of a young boy's essay book for one hundred and sixty-two years, the note waited. As I read, it opened my view of life for a child in Savannah all those years ago.

Sunday September 17, 1854

Dear Aunt...

Shadows from the gas light flickered across the small sheet of paper as John penned a short letter to his aunt who lived in Screven County. At ten years old, his eyes witnessed the decay of the world around him as his neighbors fell ill with yellow fever and died one after another. On this muggy Sunday evening in September, he struggled to describe the condition of his city. He must have felt so many emotions as he sat down to write to his distant aunt.

In his childlike handwriting and spelling, he told her about the events of his day. John had walked from his home on 86 Broughton Street (now 112 East Broughton) to the Baptist Church on Chippewa Square. The house where he lived was the same one in which his father had been born. It sat on the block between Abercorn and Drayton, closer to the corner of Drayton. Marshall House was just across the street. In contrast to the usual hubbub of street traffic, visitors to the hotel were likely fewer in number. Savannah's residents fled the city in abundant caution. This was the last year the family

would dwell on Broughton Street. George, John's older brother was building a new home for John's father on Taylor Street. When they moved, it would take the family from the hustle and bustle of a downtown business district to a neighborhood on the edge of the city.

Attending church was important to John and his mother, Sarah, even though years before his father had resigned his membership in a respectful huff over being rebuked by the elders. In the fall of 1831, George had missed some services. The strict elders of the Baptist Church had no patience for the indiscretions of its members. George was summoned for discipline. At 38 years of age, George likewise had little tolerance for explaining himself to the elders. He chose to resign his membership to the church with a formal letter. To the deacons and members of the Baptist Church Savannah

Savannah Sept 2nd 1831

Permit me to ask of you a letter of dismission, and I hope you may believe it to be consistent for you to grant it, and I shall ever pray for the welfare of the church.

Very respectfully and
Humble Servant
Geo A. Ash

P.S. Should the above request for letter of dismission not be granted, you will confer a favor by receiving this as my resignation as a member of the Church, and I shall continue to pray for the prosperity of it.⁶²

⁶² Records of Baptist Church; Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750-1860*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001). Lockley mentioned the disciplining of George in *Lines in the Sand*. He positioned the incident in the context of slave/master relationship, believing that George missed church because he was apprehending runaway slaves. There is no mention of that in the church records, nor the newspapers. He did not cite another source.

This was not the first time in George's life that he'd resigned membership from a church. When his older children were born, he had been a member of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension. His only surviving daughter, Susannah, had been baptized there as an infant. What caused George to transition to the Baptist Church from the Lutheran faith is a bit of a mystery. His great-uncle Matthias, the original member of the Ash family to migrate from Germany to Georgia in 1734, had arrived as part of a group of Lutheran refugees. They had settled near Savannah at Ebenezer.

While Ebenezer was the nucleus of the Lutheran community, the attraction of the nearby town of Savannah drew the villagers to it. Reverend Johann Martin Bolzius ministered to a congregation that met in a house. By 1772, the church had acquired the city's old courthouse and moved it to an empty lot on Bull Street bordering Wright Square (where the current building still sits). The church continued to hold steady or grow its congregation through the years. When George's father arrived from Savannah in 1790, Governor Edward Telfair granted a charter to the church that same year.⁶³

When George's father died an early death, the trajectory of his life shifted. His mother, Susannah, waited four years before she married again. In 1801, when she wed William Burnside, George would have been about eight years old. This new father figure shaped the lives of George and his older brother John. He was a builder, and he taught John his craft.

George followed his deceased father's footsteps, choosing the vocation of a tailor. While he had not chosen his stepfather's building career, William had made an evident impact on his life. As George and Eliza began adding children to their family, he honored

⁶³ GHS. Biographical/Historical Note. <http://www.georgiahistory.com>. Accessed September 1, 2016.

his stepfather by giving his two oldest children, Charles and Susannah, his surname (Burnsides). It's interesting that despite George's father dying at such a young age, he remained a member of the Lutheran church so many years later.

Likewise, why George chose to transition to the Baptist church is equally interesting. Charles, Susannah, and Georgia were all baptized as Lutherans. Georgia died as an infant. A year later, Eliza gave birth to Eugenia, but there is no record of this baby being baptized as a Lutheran. Like the previous baby born a year before, Eugenia also failed to survive infancy. Five years after he had baptized his last children at Lutheran Church of the Ascension, he had made the move to the newer Baptist Church on Franklin Square. Whether George ever rejoined the Baptist Church, or instead chose to live the rest of his life without religious affiliation is unknown.

In the years that had passed since George's resignation in 1831 to this evening in 1854, the Baptist Church had moved from its location on Franklin Square to Chippewa Square. But Franklin Square still was home to a church as the First African Baptist Church had sprung up in its place. Returning back to that September day, George's ten-year-old son John made his walk through the deep, sandy streets from his home on Broughton to the Baptist Church on Chippewa Square.

On this particular Sunday, many pews sat empty. Many of the city's white residents had abandoned the city in fear of contracting yellow fever. Among those who remained in the city, many suffered from symptoms of yellow fever. Few residents ventured out into the morning sun to attend religious services that morning.

At the Baptist church that day, John found himself in the lonely situation of being the only child to attend Sunday School. He and the superintendent went over the Bible lesson before he returned home for lunch. That evening, as John wrote to his aunt, he recounted his loneliness. So many families had left the city in an attempt to avoid the sickness that pervaded the streets that there were few children left for John to play with. He desperately wished to visit the country to see his cousins.

Pen in hand, John's loneliness caused him to act in defiance of his mother's wishes. She had forbidden him to write to his aunt. In 1854, no one knew that mosquitos spread the illness from infected people to the healthy ones. His aunt feared contracting yellow fever from John and his mother. His mother either shared the fear that a letter might transmit the disease, or she resented her sister's fear. Either way, she had instructed John not to write to her. His disobedient words highlight the dismal conditions at the peak of the epidemic.

Earlier in the summer on the steamy night of August 3, 1854, Dr. Richard J. Arnold heard a knock on his door. As the forty-six-year-old doctor rose to answer the summons, he had no idea that yellow fever was announcing its arrival. Preparing his medical supplies to make a house call, he may have been relieved that he didn't have to go out in the blistering heat of the day in the hottest summer of his lifetime. Many of the patients he had treated that summer had faded from life after suffering *coup de soleil*. Translated literally, the French term means sunburn, but doctors used it to describe death from heat stroke.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Richard J. Arnold. An essay on the relation of bilious fever and yellow fever. *Savannah Daily Journal*. June 29, 1853, p.2.

James Gallagher, the previously healthy twenty-one-year old man that Dr. Arnold had been called to see had collapsed after spending the day laboring on the roof of a house and then walking a mile back to his boarding house at the end of the day. Toiling all day under the fierce sun, James' glistening skin tempted the hungry mosquitoes. Unlike other types of mosquitoes, *Aedes aegypti* the vectors of yellow fever, sometimes swarm about during the day, rather than waiting for the cool of the evening. The young workman hailed from the North, and this was his first summer in the South. A likely candidate for *coup de soleil*, instead he exhibited the symptoms of a fever, which Dr. Arnold treated with a blue pill, demulcent (cool) drinks, and a dose of castor oil.⁶⁵

During the night, the carpenter suffered. When Dr. Arnold visited in the morning to check on him, his condition had worsened considerably. The fever ravaged his body leaving him with a pounding headache and a constant retching. His eyes, blood-shot and watery, saw delusions caused by the intensity of the illness. All through the day and into the night he lay ill. His retching now produced basins of black bile, the signature indication of yellow fever. By noon, the fever had sapped the vitality of the young working man, and he died.

Dr. Arnold carefully recorded all of the details of this first case of yellow fever. Within days, he recorded the details of several other cases, all in the northeast portion of the city, but in separate streets and houses. He emphasized that these cases were not connected to one another. Dr. Arnold also observed that though the first fatality, the Northerner in the boarding house, had succumbed to the illness, none of the other

⁶⁵ Arnold & Lockley.

boarders fell ill. Far ahead of his time, the doctor did not share the commonly held belief that yellow fever was contagious.⁶⁶

Miles away in Liberty County, Mrs. Charles Jones wrote to her son Charlie describing the horror of Savannah in great detail. “The city of Savannah has suffered beyond description.” Yellow fever - “The Angel of Death,” - decimated the city’s population both in actual deaths, and those who fled in fear. On September 10, one Sunday before John wrote to his aunt of his lonely situation in Sunday school, “not a church-going bell broke the stillness.”

Just before that churchless Sunday, a furious hurricane battered the city of Savannah. Across the river from the bluff, Hutchinson Island lay under water after it was hit by a ten foot wall of water. While the streets of Savannah lay high enough to avoid flooding, high winds had left a scattered mess in their wake. Trees snapped, falling across streets. Houses were damaged. Then as now, after a storm, the lights went out. Heavy winds damaged the gasworks, and there were no lights in the city. “If anything could heighten the scene of woe, it was the horror of darkness which for several nights brooded over the city.”⁶⁷

With so many people having fled and trains hesitating to make their way up the railroad tracks to the infected city, few shops were open, and supplies were quickly dwindling. The scarcity of candles and oil for lamps led to much darker nights in the houses and streets until workers repaired the gasworks. Vividly imagining the despair of Savannahians, “Only think of the poor sufferers under such circumstances – the sick, the

⁶⁶ Arnold, p. 9-11; William Harden, *Recollections of a Long and Satisfactory Life*.

⁶⁷ *Children of Pride*. Mrs. Mary Jones to Charles Jones Jr. September 14, 1854.

dying, the dead, all shrouded in darkness; not a ray of light with which to perform the last sad offices! With what feelings must they have watched for the breaking morn!”⁶⁸

In the days between the canceled services of September 10 and John’s class of one for Sunday school, water from the hurricane failed to dissipate quickly. Mosquitoes carrying the dreaded yellow fever made comfortable homes in the deep puddles. Sitting pools of stagnant water, the remnants of the hurricane, cosseted newly formed mosquitoes. From these puddles, they fluttered like tiny vampires to feed on the warm blood of vulnerable humans in the city, spreading the virus from one infected person to the next. Unsuspecting and defenseless, one person after the other fell victim.

Aedes aegypti females created the peak of the yellow fever epidemic in the weeks following the hurricane. In the last week of August, when 71 fresh graves had been dug to hold those stricken with yellow fever, Savannahians thought that the worst was over. In the week that John wrote his letter to his aunt, 129 people succumbed to the dreaded yellow fever. In the following week, 118 more people died. Despite September drawing to an end, the heat refused to let up.

Yellow fever was no respecter of persons. It struck young and old, rich and poor, immigrant and citizen of Savannah equally hard. At the time, they had no real idea of how the fever spread from person to person. They thought it was contagious and spread from the ill to the healthy by touch or breathing the same air as those infected. Many people left the city to protect themselves, but more than a few chose to stay in the city, believing that those native to Savannah held immunity to yellow fever. There were also

⁶⁸ *Children of Pride*. Mrs. Mary Jones to Charles Jones Jr. September 14, 1854.

those trapped in the city who had lacked the economic means to travel and to stay away from home.

Even two decades later when yellow fever again ravaged the city in 1876, medical professionals still had little idea of how the illness was spread. Dr. Louis Falligant thought that the cool of evening intensified the “poison” in the air, and that was why people became ill at night. He was convinced that it was a germ, and that if it wasn’t, “IT OUGHT TO BE!”⁶⁹

“Death!! nothing but DEATH!!” The headline of the *Savannah Morning News* sounded the warning bell to those who had fled the city and strangers who sought to visit the city. For more than three months, Savannah had been a place of constant sickness and death. Despite the warning, the cycle of the epidemic waned with the cooling of October. When frost blanketed the city in early November with a thick layer of ice, mosquitoes found themselves in a habitat most inhospitable to their natures.⁷⁰

Why John’s parents chose to stay in Savannah during the yellow fever epidemic of 1854 is a mystery. The family wasn’t poor, and John’s mother had family in Screven County, only a short train ride away. Unlike the wealthier class in Savannah who drew income from plantations they owned in Georgia while living in the city, there was no second home for the Ash family to withdraw to in the county. They would have been visitors in other’s homes. Given the nature of John’s unmailed letter to his aunt, the

⁶⁹Louis Falligant, *A Monograph on the Yellow Fever of 1876* (Savannah:Savannah Morning News Print, 1888) 40.

⁷⁰ Tim Lockley (2012) ‘Like a clap of thunder in a clear sky’: differential mortality during Savannah’s yellow fever epidemic of 1854, *Social History*, 37:2, 166-186, DOI: 10.1080/03071022.2012.675657.

family could have been reluctant to open their homes to family from the infected city of Savannah.

It's also possible that John's father believed himself and his family to be immune to the disease. His new home was being built by his son on Taylor Street, and he may have wanted to stay in the city to oversee the construction. John's mother, having lost her three-year-old daughter to illness a few years earlier, likely feared for her surviving son's life. As the children of neighbors died, it must have reminded her of her own grief.

The Ash family survived the epidemic untouched, despite having stayed in the city while many of their neighbors fled.

Election of 1860 & Secession

On the eve of the Civil War in February of 1860, yet before anyone knew there would be a war, sixteen-year-old John Hergen Ash began keeping a journal. His intent wasn't to document an election year or even to depict events leading up to the war that was to come. He was simply a student at Chatham Academy in Savannah, Georgia. At schools like Chatham Academy, teachers instructed students in the art of writing. Schools, teachers, and students implemented reading and writing as the primary tools for learning the various academic subjects taught within their classrooms. As a result, John and other young people who grew up and were educated in the 1800s weren't just literate. They were hyper-literate.

As part of John's course of studies, he was required to keep a composition notebook where he wrote out his lessons and composed other essays on a variety of subjects. In addition, he also kept a Miscellaneous book. On the pages of that book, he frequently copied bits of verse that he enjoyed and jotted down verses of his own. One

evening as John sat in his bedroom at the end of one school day preparing for the next, he began formulating a composition that would serve as his examination on a subject.

Distracted by thoughts of the future, he took a break from his studies. His good friend Albert S. Bacon, who he affectionately referred to as Abba, had given him a pamphlet describing Mercer University. As he looked over it, John contemplated what university to attend the following year once he completed his education at the local school.

Abba was one of John's closest friends. They studied together during the day. In the evenings and when they were out of school, they frequently made plans to meet at their houses, churches, and in the park. Sometimes they ran errands for their fathers together. More often than not, they chose to stroll in the newly established Forsyth Park, hoping to meet up with young ladies they knew. Only two years earlier in 1858, the fountain had been installed in the center of the iron-fenced park. Clusters of pine trees grew on the acres to create shade covering the walkways.

John and Abba shared the common surroundings of familiar streets and attended the same school. But their lives also contrasted with one another in several ways. John lived in a house with only his father and mother and the servants. His brothers and sisters were much older than he was because of his parents' previous marriages. His siblings were a generation ahead of him, and his nieces were his peers. Abba's home life was quite the opposite. As one of the middle children in a brood of ten, he had two slightly older sisters, Caroline and Louisa who were seventeen and twenty. He also had two younger brothers Dewitt and Wallace, who were fourteen and twelve. Abba also had an older brother, Edwin, who was five years older than Abba and John and attending the Savannah Medical College.

The difference between John and Abba's home lives may have been due in part to their family backgrounds. While John's father was born and raised in the city of Savannah, Abba's father hailed from Liberty County. Edwin H. Bacon, Sr. owned and managed a plantation there where many enslaved people worked. Based on this wealth, he'd had the luxury of becoming educated as an attorney,

When John spent the night, Abba's sister and her friends often provided entertainment on the piano. After the boys retired to their sleeping quarters, they kept each other awake half the night playing games and jokes on one another.

While John and his friends began to come of age in the same city his father had forty years earlier, the face of that city presented much differently. In his father's time, South Broad Street (now Oglethorpe Avenue) ribboned across the southernmost part of the town. Just within its boundary lay the Old City Cemetery, full to capacity. When Savannah first began to bury her dead, the final resting place lay on the outskirts of town. Beyond Liberty Street, the city's residents tended garden lots and allowed their livestock to graze. Outside the boundaries of West and East Broad streets, expansive rice fields spread out toward the ocean. Rice fields and the cotton fields beyond them were owned by the wealthiest citizens of the city. On coastal and country plantations, enslaved people labored to provide for those who held them.

Over time, the landscape of the city began to change to make way for more housing for its inhabitants. The first part of John's childhood was spent in a house on Broughton Street, the same house, or at least the same location of the original house, where the first George and Susannah labored and raised John's father and uncle. Slowly but surely the residences on Broughton Street evolved into places of business. The

occupants who formerly lived on the street branched out to newly created wards south of Liberty Street. In the same manner as the original wards, the new ones made the square the focal point of these tiny neighborhoods, which were in turn absorbed into the city as a whole.

Neatly laid out squares, streets, lots, and brand spanking new construction aside, Savannah retained a certain rustic charm or lack thereof, depending on the perspective. Imagine it . . . that little city with its wide sandy tree-lined streets neatly laid out with the brick and wooden houses on each side. The squares with their cisterns and fencing at intervals along the roadways. Churches and schools built for the city's inhabitants to worship and socialize and learn. Shops where people could go to buy nearly anything imaginable; groceries, clothes, jewelry, books, rum and wine crowded the shelves of the stores. The wide Savannah River served as a highway connecting the small city to the bigger cities of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Beyond urban America, Savannah had a connection to the wider Atlantic world. Cotton exchanges high above the river on the sandy bluff ensured the value of Savannah to industrial cities in both America and Europe.

Stone walls and steep steps had only recently been built to provide easier access from the docks to the street above the river. Before that, the men who worked on the boats and for the merchants struggled to climb the steep slope carting goods both to and from the ships. Then there was the disaster of Bay Street, as the city administrators endeavored time and again to find a way to pave it. In the summer of 1860, great blocks of wood cut in uniform shapes had been laid down on the sand and covered with tar to seal it. Summer heat and the weight of wagons caused the blocks to shift and the tar to

become gooey and smelly. Only a few streets had boardwalks next to them. Heavy storms flooded the lanes and caused them to fill with water. Sand and water mixed together to create a nearly impassable sloppy mess. To drain the lanes, a heavy plow dragged by oxen dug a furrow through the middle of the streets.⁷¹

And the people. Men and women, young and old, enslaved and free, white and black, and every shade in between trudging through the deep sand; each of them going about their daily lives, some with more leisure and pleasure than others. At the top of the social and economic ladder were people like the Telfairs, Mercers, Gordons, and Andersons. Families like these with long histories of distinguished military or political service who held great wealth could afford carriages to keep spare their shoes from contact with the sand. At the opposite extreme were enslaved people who enjoyed little control over the direction of their own lives and who lived and worked alongside those who held absolute power over them. In between the two extremes, poor whites weren't much better off than those who were enslaved. Without property, they may have suffered more impoverishment as far as food as clothing go, than those who were the legal property of others. Above them, were free people of color, some of who had prospered enough to purchase their own enslaved servants.

Situated between the three lower rungs, but below the elite, was a thick layer of people in the middle. These people worked with their hands in a way that the elite did not. They were grocers, bakers, builders, and artisans. In levels of stratification even among the middle, there were also teachers, ministers, and small-scale merchants. In this dense middle, the Ash family found its comfort. John's older brother, also named George,

⁷¹ William Harden. *Recollections of a Long and Satisfactory Life*.

built houses for a living. In 1855, he built a townhouse for his father and stepmother in Wesley Ward, which hadn't long been developed.

After sixty-five years of living at the Reynolds Ward location on Broughton Street, John's father moved his wife and son to a brand new house on the outskirts of town nearer Forsyth Park. John's other older brother, Charles had also moved to the new Wesley Ward neighborhood. As close neighbors, John spent nearly as much time at the homes of his two older brothers as he did at his own.⁷²

His first journal entry records the details of his daily life. Early one Saturday morning, he awoke "for the purpose of taking a walk" before breakfast with his friend Albert Bacon. The two boys wanted to take advantage of a day off of school at the Chatham Academy. Weather dampened their plans with rain, and he waited until later in the morning before leaving to walk "up Town" with Abba.⁷³

John's days were filled with reading, writing essays, running business errands for his father, attending church services, and wandering around the city with his friends. A diffident fellow, John would sometimes walk in Forsyth Park, just a few blocks from his home. There he would pass the time smoking the occasional cigar and attempting to work up his nerve to initiate conversations with young ladies he often encountered in the park. When John's pals Albert Bacon and Eben Williams accompanied him, he found it easier to spark up conversations with the girls and their chaperones.

⁷² Roulhac Toledano. *The National Trust Guide to Savannah*. (New York: Preservation Press, 1997) 124, 166.

⁷³ John H. Ash MSS 12, February 18, 1860.

Later that same Saturday, February 18, 1860, John spent the afternoon at home reading a theological book debating the differences between the Baptist and Presbyterian doctrines and arguing that the Baptist church was more closely aligned with the teachings of the New Testament. The following day, John observed the Sabbath by attending services at the First Baptist Church where Reverend Sylvanus Landrum served as the congregation's pastor. In the morning he went to the regular service followed by an afternoon at Sabbath School. That evening, he went to the night service. On the few Sundays when John stayed home and absented himself from the gatherings, it was because he suffered from tooth pain. Eventually, he relieved himself from the frequent pain by having his tooth pulled by a local dentist.

John, in his attendance of the services, was continuing on a path paved for him by his mother, Sarah. She was a woman of "deep piety" who wished for her only son to enter the ministry. His mother emphasized the importance of prayer to her young son. Tragedy has a way of testing faith, as it had when John's sister had died in 1849 when he was only six years old. His mother's reliance on God for comfort influenced the development of his own faith.⁷⁴

Ten years later, the sixteen-year-old John nurtured his spirituality at church, but he also reaped social benefits from his attendance. There was no school on Sundays, so attending church at any of Savannah's local congregations offered the people of the town an opportunity to gather with one another. For unmarried people, it was an especially

⁷⁴ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, (Compiled for the Christian index. Atlanta, GA. 1881)

appealing chance for young men and women to mingle. John often attended one church or another with hopes of walking a young lady home in the evening.

School occupied a large portion of John's daily life. Like his older brothers and sisters had before him, John spent his days at Chatham Academy. The presence of young ladies in his geometry class "render[ed] the exercise more agreeable than otherwise it would [have been]." Schoolhouse attendance required fewer daylight hours. John's school day began in the morning and ended by two in the afternoon.

After that time, he was free to amuse himself. Some afternoons he played cards with his older sisters, others he pitched quoits, a game similar to horseshoes that originated in ancient Greece. The object of the game was to toss a ring from a distance in hopes of landing on a stake. Due to the popularity of quoits, competitive clubs were formed. Other afternoons, John hunted for quail or snipe, which he sold for pocket money. He may have exchanged some of these coins for the sweet temptations of ice cream and pastries that Aspasia Cruvellier Mirault at her confectionary. His brother, George, built the house where Mirault lived with her children.⁷⁵

John's extended family and his network of friends kept him busy. George II, his father, trusted John to run business errands for him in the afternoons after school. Collecting rent or delivering papers for his father was the usual task. While John had two older half-brothers and a half-sister from his father's first marriage and two older half-

⁷⁵ Janice Sumler-Edmond, *The Secret Trust of Aspasia Cruvellier Mirault: The Life and Trials of a Free Woman of Color in Antebellum Georgia*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008) p. 104. After Mirault's death, George H. Ash was called to testify in the property dispute over the house that he had built for Mirault. Her daughter's white lover had lived in the house with the Mirault family. He claimed that the property should belong to him and not Mirault's sons.

sisters from his mother's first marriage, he was the only surviving child from their marriage to one another. His relationship with his mother and father as the only child they shared was different than the relationships his parents had with their adult children. George displayed his affection for his youngest son, who he named in memory of his older brother, by giving him gifts. John casually mentioned his father giving him a gold watch after dinner one evening as though it were a regular occurrence.⁷⁶

Despite the deep affection his parents with which his parents treated him, childhood still held its challenges for young John. Both father and son shared a stubborn streak. Before Chatham Academy, where John excelled academically, he had not so enjoyed primary school. In his book of essays where he collected his assigned writing at Chatham Academy, he recalled his earlier education. "On his first appearance as a scholar [he believed himself] to have been about three years old." A long, leather strap hanging on the wall in the classroom made a deep impression on the little boy. On days when he'd failed to learn his assigned vocabulary words, his teacher would take down the strap and "play upon his back." For most children, the punishment drew forth the desired results. But John found himself among the exceptionally mischievous children at the school, who found themselves constantly in trouble.

At the age of nine, when he was "completely disgusted with the idea of every day getting a whipping" with the aforesaid strap, he persuaded his father to allow him to change schools. Mr. Bulloughs ran a school that employed a switch rather than a strap, and he preferred beating hands rather than rumps. Even though John was equally unhappy with the new school, he had to stay there until he was old enough to attend

⁷⁶ John H. Ash, MSS 12, February 22, 1860.

Chatham Academy. He knew his father well enough to know that he wouldn't be allowed the same leniency again. In the days before educational reform, the harshness of failures to learn efficiently at school reflected the proclivity towards violence to enforce obedience that permeated the South.⁷⁷

When John's mother Sarah went upcountry by train to Screven County to visit her brothers, John would often accompany her to visit his uncles and cousins. If he couldn't leave town because of school, he would go with her to the railroad depot when she left and meet her there when she returned. His relationship with his sisters seems closer than that to his brothers. John often mentioned in his journals that he accompanied his sisters on errands, strolled with them to pick jasmine, walked to church with them, or spent evenings in their homes.

Besides church, school, and his family, John enjoyed other social occasions with his friends. His closest friends were Albert "Abba" Bacon, Eben Williams, and Henry J. Wade. This group of buddies went to church together, strolled the streets and park, ran errands, and tried to chat with young ladies. John exchanged ambrotypes with Abba and daguerreotypes with Eben. It was also with Eben that John confided that he had begun keeping a journal. With his friends, John often went to see the local military regiments such as the Georgia Hussars and the Jasper Greens on parade.

The young ladies with whom John's group of friends associated were his own cousins Lizzy and Anna Ash, Abba's two sisters, Caroline and Louisa, Eben's sister, Louisa, and Estella and Florida Powers. Unlike the other girls, Estella and Florida, who were sisters, did not live in Savannah. Instead, they lived in Effingham County near

⁷⁷ John H. Ash. Book of Essays.

Whitesville (now Guyton). Estella and Florida visited Savannah often and stayed with friends there. John's friendship with Estella began in the spring of 1860, and it would slowly bloom into a romantic relationship.

John's group of friends felt protective of the "young ladies" (as they referred to them) in their social circle. Honor and patriarchy formed the bedrock of Southern society. Though still schoolboys, they were steeped in the traditions of defending the virtue and reputation of those within their circle. Any slight to one's honor was cause for reprisal. In the face of an insult, orderly violence was a southern man's duty.

One afternoon Eben called on John at his house to ask him to walk up town with him. A young woman that he was acquainted with had her image taken in an office in town. Jeffrey, who worked at the office, chose to display her ambrotype in the window. This action upset Eben's friend, who did not want to have her image on public display. Eben, who was also angry, asked John to go with him to the office for moral support. When they arrived at their destination, Jeffrey calmly removed the ambrotype at once, and the two young fellows seemed a little disappointed that the matter was resolved so easily. John described the incident as if it would have been more satisfactory for both himself and Eben if the man had put up a little resistance. Jeffrey's peaceful agreement with the boys' request negated the need for the "smash up" to protect a young woman's honor that they had planned on the walk to the shop.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ John H. Ash, MSS 12, September 13, 1860.

While adhering to the tenets of duty and honor were important rites of southern manhood, Eben may have felt unusually compelled to protect those around him. As a boy, he spent summer days in a house near the Vernon River. His grandfather, David Adams, owned a great deal of land on Skidaway Island. When Eben's father died, his mother, Margaret Williams leased most of her property to care for herself and her five children. She chose to live near her father, perhaps to provide a father figure for her children. Adams attended White Bluff Church where the Reverend Benjamin Burroughs was the pastor.

Many years later Charles Olmstead recounted the tragic events of a summer day in 1852. He had lived with the Burroughs family at Avon Hall as a pupil of the reverend. The Burroughs children referred to Eben's mother as "Aunt Margaret," as did Olmstead. On an exceptionally beautiful day, nine-year-old Eben went out to play with the pastor's children. Reverend Burroughs and his wife were away from home, and his daughters had been invited to spend the day playing with the Creamer children who lived nearby. The waters of the Vernon River had carved out a sandy beach where they played that day. A bluff a few feet in height bordered the beach. The little girls scooped out make believe "houses" in the face of the bluff. Their houses caused the weight of the sandy shelf to shift, and the sand collapsed on top of them completely burying them. Eben ran across the beach to dig them out of the sand. Laura Burroughs suffocated before he could reach her.

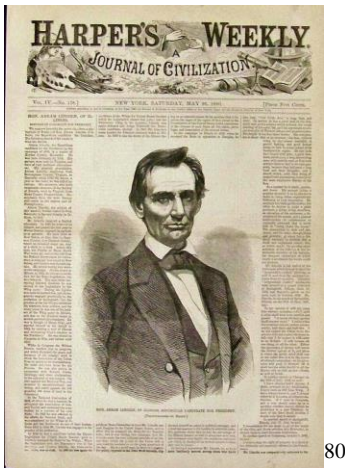
From the porch where he was reading, Olmstead heard the commotion of the younger children and rushed to see what the matter was. The only adult on the premises was a servant who tried valiantly to save the suffering little girl. When her attempts failed, she sent for the parents and a doctor. The doctor would be needed to administer medication to calm the grieving parents. Olmstead was deeply affected by the death of Laura Burroughs. It stands to reason that the little boy who tried to save her from the sand grave where she was buried also felt the effects of such a traumatic event.⁷⁹

In 1860, an election year, Savannahians were absorbed with political chatter. During the months John recorded his activities in his journal, he attended at least three political events. The candidates for president in an election that would change the course of the United States were as follows: Stephen Douglas was the Democratic candidate; John Breckenridge was the Southern Democratic candidate; both John Bell and Edward Everett were Constitutional Union party candidates. While John casually noted his attendance at events for Breckenridge, Douglas, Bell, and Everett, he neglected to say what he thought of the candidates themselves or the election as a whole. Possibly, he didn't support any particular candidate, and that he was only attending the political events as entertainment. Politics in the nineteenth century functioned as somewhat of a spectator sport. Speeches often drew throngs of people eager for a spectacle.

⁷⁹ Collections of the Georgia Historical Society. Memoirs of Charles Olmstead. Pg. 39-40.

When the Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln as their candidate for president, the only consensus among the southern states was anyone but Lincoln. In his tall, lanky form, he represented everything that Southerners had long despised and feared among advocates of abolition and anti-slavery in the North. Election chatter took on a heightened vitriol as newspapers across the South sought to disparage him. Southerners would have been just as likely to oppose any other Republican candidate, but they especially loved to hate Lincoln.

Shortly after Lincoln's May 1860 nomination, *Harper's Weekly* printed a portrait of him for its readers. A clean-shaven Lincoln dressed in a three-piece suit with a cravat gazes seriously at the readers from the cover of the journal. The article included a summation of his career up to that point.



The *Charleston Mercury* responded to the article in *Harpers Weekly* with harsh criticism of Lincoln while simultaneously pounding mercilessly on his physical appearance. “A horrid looking wretch is he! – sooty and scoundrelly in aspect; a cross between the nutmeg dealer, the horse-swapper, and the nightman.” The Charleston paper

⁸⁰ *Harpers Weekly*, May 26, 1860.

compared the portrait of Lincoln to a wanted poster that a local sheriff might post to warn his constituents to be on the lookout. The writers wrapped up their demonization of Lincoln with this jab, “He is a lank-sided Yankee, of the uncomeliest visage, and one of the dirtiest complexion, and the most indecent comparisons. Faugh! After him, what decent white man would be President!”⁸¹

Obviously, they knew Abraham Lincoln to be a fellow white Southerner. Their rhetoric was aimed at his nomination by the “Black Republican” party. Lincoln in no way agreed with the fieriest Republicans and abolitionists who called for an immediate end of slavery. He held a more moderate view. Personally he believed slavery to be immoral and opposed its expansion into the western territories, but in 1860, he had no plans for the emancipation of slaves. Outside of the South, others held a more nuanced view of Lincoln’s position. Frederick Douglass, a most ardent abolitionist, expressed hopeful optimism when speaking of the nomination of Lincoln. There is a “possibility of electing, if not an Abolitionist, at least an *anti-slavery reputation* to the Presidency.”⁸²

Still, those in the South acted according to their own sensibilities. Encasing their disapproval of Lincoln in racial terms, the Charlestonians demonstrated their belief in their own racial superiority. In their hearts, they were convinced that they were superior to those whom they enslaved solely on the basis of ethnicity. They didn’t have the slightest of doubts: it was a fact. Lincoln, as the nominee of the Republican Party, directly threatened their way of life. In their minds, if Lincoln won the election, then everything was at risk. Slaveholders had more at stake as their prosperity depended

⁸¹ *Daily Morning News*, June 8, 1860.

⁸² Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005) p. 331.

entirely on those they owned, but nonslaveholders felt equally threatened. Liberty and honor would be under attack if Lincoln attained the highest office in the land. Savannah's own *Daily Morning News* reprinted the *Charleston Mercury* critique of Lincoln with approval. Savannah wasn't alone, so many other newspapers also published the Charleston attack on Lincoln's appearance and character that some authors have incorrectly attributed it to the wrong source.

Only a couple of weeks later, the *Daily Morning News* lamented the failure of the free states and even New York to back John Bell and Edward Everett as the nominees of the Constitutional Union Party. Savannah, along with the rest of the South, feared the results of a Republican victory. This lamentation reflected their fear that in the election of 1860, slavery was under attack.⁸³

Later that summer, the *Daily Morning News* firmly endorsed John Breckenridge and Joseph Lane for president and vice president. The editors saw these two men "as the best means of securing and maintaining the constitutional equality and rights of the South in the Union." In an effort to increase its coverage, the paper reduced its subscription rate, an attempt to influence their readers to view the issue in the same way they did. They "believed[ed] that it [was] only necessary, in order to arouse our people to the vital importance of the one great issue involved in the present canvass, and to array them as one man."⁸⁴

⁸³ *Daily Morning News*, June 22, 1860.

⁸⁴ *Daily Morning News*, August 2, 1860.

On the same day in August of 1860 that one of Savannah's local papers so strongly endorsed Breckenridge for President, for sixteen-year-old John, it was an ordinary school day. Chatham Academy did not let its pupils out for the summer, but rather continued holding classes year round. He spent the day in class and working on homework afterwards, translating Greek to English. After he finished his studies, he went uptown and collected rent for his father's properties. He also stopped by the office of the Central of Georgia Railroad (C.R.R.) to be paid \$45 for Wylly's labor. Later that Thursday evening, he went to church.⁸⁵

John had been hard at work on his studies. Later that August, the Classical Department of the academy awarded prizes to both John and another student for achieving the highest grades in the school. He referred to his companion as a boy. In his mind, adulthood hadn't arrived yet.⁸⁶

All was well in his sheltered middle class world where John thrived on his studies and where slavery gusseted his and his family's comfortable life. Like most other people in Savannah, even when he attended church his conscience was clear. Slavery was not a burden for him, but rather a blessing. Whether he knew it or not, his time of cozy dependence was swiftly nearing an end. Political forces beyond his control shifted on the horizon and would build to a crescendo after the election in November.

In October of 1860, only a month before the presidential election, John's journals abruptly end. The reason for this is unclear. Maybe John simply became bored with the journals and decided to stop recording his thoughts. It's also conceivable that John left

⁸⁵ John H. Ash. August 2, 1860.

⁸⁶ Ash, August 10, 1860.

out a journal that may have covered the missing year for personal reasons.⁸⁷ It wasn't until November of 1861, more than a year later that John began keeping them again. By that point, the nation was at war. There are no available pages written in John's hand from October 1860 through November 1861, so his voice is virtually silent through this turbulent period for the city of Savannah and the whole of the United States. But other voices are not silent. Southern men (publicly) and women (privately) raised their voices in protest against the election of Abraham Lincoln to the executive office.

Prominent men in Savannah expressed their anti-Northern and pro-slavery sentiments and their fierce aversion to the election of Lincoln in the weeks before the casting of ballots. Richard Arnold, Mayor of Savannah, wrote to his daughter in September. "The people of the North are a foreign and hostile people to us and I wish no alliance with them... [they] carry their meddling to our very hearthstones. I wish the affair would come to a point. I wish to breast the storm now and not to have it burst over the heads of those dear to me after I shall have laid mine in the grave."⁸⁸

It would be a mistake to assume that the rhetoric of those in Savannah existed only outside the bubble of John's world. The fervor that possessed the city resounded in the streets. While the mayor may not have been within the social reach of a teenage boy, others were closer. Francis S. Bartow was an administrator of the Chatham Academy and

⁸⁷ The journals are complete from when he resumed keeping them in 1861 until the early months of 1865. During the war, he faithfully wrote in his journals on a daily basis. After he filled all the pages in one of the small books, he mailed it home to his mother for safekeeping. While he also wrote many letters to Estella, his mother, and his sisters during the war, only the journals survive. In this way, he told his mother as well as anyone who reads his journals all the details of his daily life.

⁸⁸ James David Griffin. *Savannah, Georgia, During the Civil War*. (Dissertation: University of Georgia, 1963) p. 50-51.

also one of the fieriest orators in the city. Tom Wragg, a schoolmate and friend of John's idolized Bartow. Likely, Bartow's speeches were a topic of conversation between the two.⁸⁹

Speaking of the national debate over slavery, Bartow declared, "I am tired of this endless controversy. I am wearied with seeing this threatening cloud forever above our heads. If the storm is to come...I court it now in a day of my vigor and strength." Seeking both to convey his love for the Union and at the same time his will to resist what he saw as subjugation at all costs, he went on. "I do not wish to destroy the government. I am a Union man in every fiber of my heart . . . God never launched a nation on a more magnificent career. It has been the home of the oppressed and the asylum of the desolate from every land. In it today are wrapped the hopes of universal man." Yet, because of the intensity of his beliefs, he declared with passion, "But I will peril all—ALL before I will abandon our rights in the Union or submit to be governed by an unprincipled majority."⁹⁰

Certainly Arnold and Bartow were not the only citizens of Savannah and other cities across the South who expressed these thoughts and feelings. Many others did too. Those who spoke with such zeal and fervor during the 1860 election season did so before the first ballot had even been cast. These speeches were merely a prelude to what was to come.

⁸⁹ Melton, p.178.

⁹⁰ Griffin, p. 51.

In November, the nation came together one last time in an attempt to choose a president. Yet, before the ballots had been counted or the results were even made known, Savannah newspapers worried over the outcome of a Lincoln victory and what it would mean for both the South and the entire Union.

In a deeply divided election year which pitted North against South, Abraham Lincoln won the White House. Following that event, passion prevailed in the streets, squares, homes, and forums in Southern cities. The sound of their collective voice rose until it was heard as a howl of defiance against the United States. Dissenting voices of those who urged caution were too few for the sound to carry far, so they were drowned out. Prominent men in leadership in both Charleston and Savannah led the citizens of their cities in demonstrating their displeasure at the election of Lincoln. Influencing their states to secede from the Union became their primary and immediate goal.

Elite men called their conventions. Fiery orations were given in favor of secession, while more reasonable voices called for caution. Only a week after Lincoln was elected, Alexander H. Stephens was one of those in attendance at a special session of the Georgia legislature called by Governor Joseph Brown to discuss the possibilities of secession. As a Southerner, he certainly understood the fear and passion circulating through the South. There, standing in the minority, among men who breathed fire and disunion, Stephens attempted reason. "My object is not to stir up strife," he began "but rather to allay it." He wished, "Not to appeal to your passions, but to your reason." And reason with those gathered, he did.

“My countrymen,” Stephens identified with his audience, “I tell you frankly, candidly, and earnestly, that I do not think that [the Southern states should secede from the Union].” While slavery had long been a wedge between the North and the South, the election of Lincoln was the immediate catalyst for those eager to secede. His views were so distasteful to most Southerners that secession seemed justified. Stephens disagreed. “In my judgment, the election of no man, constitutionally chosen to that high office, is sufficient cause to justify any State to separate from the Union. It ought to stand by and aid still in maintaining the Constitution of the country.”

Not that Stephens was any happier with the results of the election than those he addressed in that crowded room. “We went into the election with this people. The result was different from what we wished; but the election has been constitutionally held.” In his view, if the South seceded in reaction to a free and fair election, then it would bear the burden of reacting unethically. “Can we, therefore, for the mere election of any man to the Presidency, and that, too, in accordance with the prescribed forms of the Constitution . . . without becoming the breakers of that sacred instrument ourselves, by withdrawing ourselves from it? Would we not be in the wrong?”

As the frail man stood in the packed room in Milledgeville that day, he concluded his speech by warning that “were we to make a point of resistance to the Government and go out of the Union merely on that account, the record would be made up hereafter against us.” Challenging the honor of his fellowmen, he articulated, “Let the fault and the wrong rest upon others. If all our hopes are to be blasted, if the Republic is to go down, let us be found to the last moment standing on the deck with Constitution of the United States waving over our heads.” On a final note, he harkened back to one of the fiercest

arguments of slaveholders as they viewed abolitionists who worked to push the nation's agenda towards abolition. "Let the fanatics of the North break the Constitution, if such is their fell purpose. Let the responsibility be upon them."⁹¹

Unfortunately, Stephens' voice of reason was lost on those who had gathered that day to listen to speeches and give their own. Men deeply offended by the election of Lincoln ruled the day. South Carolina seceded from the Union, and Georgia soon followed in her stubborn, bold footsteps. Those who didn't take office in the newly created government used their wealth and influence to form and head military regiments. They posted ads in the local newspapers calling for young men to join them in their rebellion against the Federal government. In a rush of Southern patriotism, respected and accomplished members of the United States Army and Navy resigned their commissions and joined the cause of the Confederacy. Two men with deep roots in Savannah offered their services to President Jefferson Davis. General Hugh Mercer assumed command of the land-based coastal defense operations outside Savannah.

⁹¹ Speech of Alexander H. Stephens, November 14, 1860.
<http://civilwarcauses.org/steph2.htm>. Accessed March 11, 2016.

Likewise, Commodore Josiah Tattnall led the attempt to build a strong southern navy. When Tattnall resigned his commission in the United States Navy, he left as a highly regarded career naval commander. His loyalty to his birth state led him to render her aid even though he opposed secession. Ready and willing to serve, he held no false confidence in the fledgling southern navy he'd been tasked to prepare for war. Of the boats purchased from private citizens to outfit for battle, he spoke bluntly, "I have no fleet." Perhaps seeking to temper expectations, he exclaimed, "Long before the Southern Confederacy has a fleet that can cope with the Stars and Stripes, my bones will be white in the grave."⁹²

So even before Georgia seceded, Savannahians had rushed to prepare for Northern invasion. Southerners saw the people of the North as the sole reason for the rupture that threatened to destroy the Union. Although John's thoughts during those momentous months are unknown, another young man, only eight years older, who was also a resident of Savannah faithfully wrote in his journal from 1860-1865. In December of 1860, George A. Mercer recorded "Fanaticism has taken complete possession of the public mind." Abolitionism, as the Southerner saw it, was dangerous and must be fought against at every turn. And how could the mind of the Southerner see the fault within itself when "God could call the slave-holder Abraham his friend?"⁹³

Mercer's words illustrate the extreme sectionalism that divided the nation following the election. Only a few months earlier in the summer, Sgt. Mercer had accompanied his Republican Blues to meet with the New York City Guard. There

⁹² William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South* (Boston: T.O.H.P Burnham, 1863) p. 156.

⁹³ George A. Mercer, December 28, 1860.

following the “popping of corks and the smoke of . . . thousands of ‘best Havanas’,” Mercer declared, “The Blues, were planted as an humble seed by the side of the Constitution. They would cling to it, and clamber by it, and though the old tree should wither, and its branches decay, they would still be found with their foundation near its roots.”

In response to Mercer’s words, the President of the New York Guards, Alex Henriques gave this toast in reply. Both the Blues and the Guards “sprang from one common line – the line of American soil. Both were equally ready and willing to fight for mutual rights.” Briefly interrupted by applause, Henriques went on, “Before the Blues returned to show them that the North had been misrepresented; that there was no intention to militate against Southern institutions . . . The Guards extended to the Blues the right hand of fellowship – took them to their arms, and would keep them there.” At these words, the Blues burst into “rousing cheers.”

Last to stand to address the mingled gathering of Guards and Blues was Captain John W. Anderson, George Mercer's uncle. To illustrate his loyalty to the Union, Captain Anderson reminded those gathered that during the sectionalism in 1850 "in defiance of his own party, [he had] stood up for the Union and the Constitution." In dramatic emphasis of his continued loyalty and the fraternity of the Republican Blues and the New York Guards, the Captain declared that, "He knew that the Guards and the Blues were willing to stain their white and blue breasts red in the defense of their common country, the Union and the Constitution. They would know no North or South as far as these two Companies were concerned." Again, applause followed his speech.⁹⁴

Six months after the rousing speeches given by nephew and uncle in New York, both men found themselves in quite different positions. As officers in the Republican Blues, they felt bound by duty, patriotism, and family ties against what they saw as the fanaticism of the North in the election of Lincoln. With greater passion than they displayed in New York, they defended the South.

While all this activity was taking place in the South, in Springfield, Illinois, the president elect spent his days at a desk drafting the speech he would give at his inauguration. Lincoln struggled to understand the reaction of the South to his impending presidency. On a December day, he wrote to his old friend from Washington, Alexander H. Stephens. Beginning the letter with the cautious request, "For your own eye only," Lincoln questioned Stephens,

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, July 23, 1860.

My dear Sir

Your obliging answer to my short note is just received, and for which please accept my thanks. I fully appreciate the present peril the country is in, and the weight of responsibility on me.

Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly, or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves? If they do, I wish to assure you, as once a friend, and still, I hope, not an enemy, that there is no cause for such fears.

The South would be in no more danger in this respect, than it was in the days of Washington. I suppose, however, this does not meet the case. You think slavery is right and ought to be extended; while we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln⁹⁵

Lincoln had southern roots, he'd grown up in Kentucky and married into a slaveholding family. Honor and assault to southern manhood were not new concepts to him. Yet, he still had trouble understanding the strong and to him disproportionate reaction in the South and Southerners' panic that the election of a "Black Republican" threatened the foundation that the social and economic structure upon which their society was built upon. Reaching out to his Southern friend, he struggled to comprehend the realities of the political world in which he found himself.

When Lincoln had extended an olive branch to Stephens, he attempted to deemphasize the extent to which North and South disagreed over slavery. In his view, conflict centered around whether or not slavery should be allowed to expand into newly settled territories or restricted to the areas where it already existed. This is not at all how those in the South viewed the issue. When Stephens responded to the earnest inquiry of

⁹⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Alexander H. Stephens. December 22, 1860.
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-alexander-h-stephens/>. Accessed March 11, 2016.

Lincoln, his response indicated that he realized the dangers of impending disunion. In doing so, he conveyed to Lincoln both his own and the South's anger with the North.

Stephens set to work expounding on the variations between their viewpoints. He wrote thoughtfully, "We at the South do think African slavery, as it exists with us, both morally and politically right." Highlighting the divisiveness that existed between the two regions, he accused the "Northern States" of acting with a "Reckless spirit" and even indulging of "exhibitions of madness."

Stephens closed his response to the president-elect by asking him, "Excuse me for giving you these views. Excuse the strong language used. Nothing but deep interest I feel in prospect of the most alarming dangers now threatening our common country would induce me to do it." Embedded in the center of his letter was one single sentence in which he served up the underlying principle of Southerners. "This opinion is founded upon the inferiority of the black race."⁹⁶

Although Stephens had initially urged caution, he now accepted secession. Governor Joseph Brown of Georgia followed the example of South Carolina, as it sought to fortify the state. In early January of 1861, Colonel Alexander Lawton led approximately 150 men from Savannah to Fort Pulaski to remove the lone U.S. Sergeant charged with command of the fort from his place. On that overcast afternoon, there was no struggle, simply an exchange of ownership. Those in Savannah knew that "Georgia [was] still in the union, [but thought that] only absolute necessity" justified the taking of federal property. While the passion behind these actions ran deep, excitement and energy

⁹⁶ Alexander Stephens letter to Abraham Lincoln. December 30, 1860. <http://www.ucslouisiana.edu/~ras2777/amgov/stephensreply.htm>. Accessed March 11, 1860.

shouldn't be interpreted as happiness in every case. No doubt some did find joy in the opportunity to prepare for war, but most were "deeply excited and many very sad."⁹⁷

Men - patriotic first to their homes and states - had taken Fort Pulaski in a moment of uncertainty about their place within the Union. The Federal presence at the fortress was scarce. The United States Army soldiers there had surrendered the fort with no shots fired when a delegation of Savannahians showed up at its gates. Only two weeks later, their position became more clear. On January 19, news reached the city that the Georgia Convention had voted for immediate secession from the Union. An excited George Mercer recorded in his journal that fateful Saturday, "the 19th of January 1861 is become the most memorable day in our annals." Late that night, cannon boomed in the winter air as the people cheered at the news. They celebrated, "Georgia is free, and determined to remain equal, free and independent."⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Mercer, January 2, 1861; *Savannah Republican*, January 3&4, 1861.

⁹⁸ Mercer, January 19, 1861.

CHAPTER 4

CIVIL WAR

Transition from Civilian to Soldier

With this action, John's idyllic young adulthood of studies and social occasions in Savannah, Georgia was interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War. On one hand, John was excited by the possibility of war. In the initial wave of passion, young men in both the North and the South hastily committed themselves to the cause by joining regiments. John and his friends found themselves no less eager to join the fight for what they saw as Southern independence from Northern rule. The next month, John enlisted in the Savannah Volunteer Guards, one of the oldest military regiments in Savannah.⁹⁹

Captain John Screven ordered John to report for duty at the Armory to march to Fort Pulaski on February 6, 1861. Like the men who had joined Screven in January, John probably took a steamer out to Cockspur Island where the fort was situated. He arrived at the fort as ordered on February 9. When he stepped off the boat, he joined the other men who had been hard at work over the last month restoring the fort and her guns to working order. With great anticipation and excitement, he joined them in their daily routine. Like the other "young men . . . quite fascinated with the life," the firing of a gun awoke him in the morning before the sun had risen to begin the busy day. Guard mounting, inspection, drill, and dress parade were new to these raw cheerful recruits. In between these military routines, they pitched in with manual labor preparing the fort to defend the gates to their

⁹⁹ John H. Ash Collection, MSS 12, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University.

city. Enslaved men worked just outside the walls of Pulaski mucking out the silt and trash that filled the moat after years of neglect.¹⁰⁰

John's first attempt at soldiering was short-lived. Perhaps, he injured himself while working with heavy materials or maybe he fell ill. Regardless of the cause, only a week after he'd arrived, the Surgeon of his regiment declared him to be "permanently unfit for duty" and an immediate release was granted for him to return to Savannah on a permanent leave of absence.¹⁰¹

He returned to Savannah on a steamer from Cockspur Island leaving the busy preparations at the fort behind on Valentine's Day. As he climbed the steep stairs leading up the bluff to Bay Street to return to his father and mother and their home on Taylor Street, many thoughts must have filled his mind. Did he regret that his military service had been so brief? Was he worried that his parents would be disappointed upon his return? Or maybe he was so sick that he only wanted the comfort of home. Did he plan on returning to school? Or was he waiting to see what event would happen next before he determined his next step? Did he stay in the city, or did he visit his family in the country?

It's impossible to know what John's daily activities were during this time when none of his papers survive. But from the journals of others and from following the *Savannah Morning News* and the *Savannah Republican*, we know that the following months were event-filled. Only a couple of weeks after John's brief military stint, Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as president of the United States. Everything that had happened up to that point had been done while James Buchanan still held the office.

¹⁰⁰ Mercer. January 19, 1861.

¹⁰¹ John H. Ash Collection, MSS 12.

Seven states had seceded; South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

In Washington, D.C., Abraham Lincoln stood before a crowd of thousands to give his inaugural speech on March 4, 1861. He had taken the advice of young Grace Bedell, and had grown a beard. The little girl had written to him in October before he was elected. “Your face is so thin,” she mused that “whiskers” might just be the thing that would attract ladies to persuade their husbands to vote for him. Responding to her letter, he wondered to her, “do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affectation if I were to begin it now?”¹⁰² The panic in the South upon his election to the presidency denied him the joy of victory. On his shoulders rested the great weight of holding the Union together at all costs. Less a silly affectation, his new whiskers may have been a subconscious attempt to prepare himself for the new responsibility he would bear. Lincoln had never worn a beard before, but he had also never been president before. His presidency came at a time of the greatest national crisis since the inception of the United States.

On the East Portico of the Capitol, Lincoln drew in his breath and began to speak his first sentence. He emphasized the establishment of the government by the Constitution. “In compliance with a custom as old as the Government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly and to take in your presence the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States to be taken by the President ‘before he enters on the execution of this office’.”

¹⁰² Grace Bedell letter, October 15, 1860. Abraham Lincoln letter, October 19, 1860. <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gracebedell.htm>. Accessed March 9, 2016.

Immediately afterwards he sought to appeal to both those who had already seceded from the Union, and to persuade the slaveholding states that remained to stay. “Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States that by the accession of a Republican Administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered.” Addressing their “special anxiety [and] excitement” he reminded Southerners that, “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.”

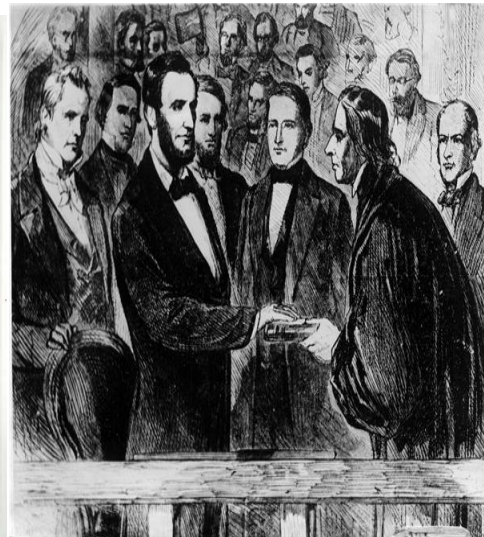
While Lincoln pledged that he had no intention of interfering with the South’s “peculiar institution,” many of his supporters harbored more radical goals. He understood that abolitionists’ enthusiasm for the Republican Party had helped to secure his election. Southerners also knew it. That knowledge made Lincoln the hated symbol of abolitionism in their eyes. At the same time he spoke to reassure the South, he struck a blow to the hopes of abolitionists who had helped elect him in hopes of furthering their shining cause. “Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations and had never recanted them.” To further emphasize that he meant his previously spoken words, he said, “I now reiterate these sentiments, and in doing so I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible that the property, peace, and security of no section are to be in any wise endangered by the now incoming Administration.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Goodwin, P. 331. “The whole tone of the speech, Douglass claimed, revealed Lincoln’s compulsion to grovel ‘before the foul and withering curse of slavery. Some thought we had in Mr. Lincoln the nerve and decision of an Oliver Cromwell; but the result shows that we merely have a continuation of the Pierces and Buchananas.”

Lincoln went on for some time that day describing the Constitution and the debate that had taken place with regard to slavery from the time it was written to the day he was speaking. While he swore to uphold the Constitution, not to interfere with slavery where it existed, and that the Union must remain unbroken, he likewise declared his preference for a peaceful resolution to sectional differences. “In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence, and there shall be none unless it be forced upon the national authority.”

“My countrymen,” Lincoln appealed to his Southern brethren, “think calmly . . . Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time.” Winding up his first speech as president in which he had carefully considered his words in a valiant effort to halt the rending of the country, he uttered one of the most remembered paragraphs in American history.

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature.¹⁰⁴



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¹⁰⁴ <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres31.html>. Accessed March 7, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Photo 1 from www.loc.org. Photo 2 from NYT. Accessed March 7, 2016.

As dusk fell in Savannah, a telegraph delivered Lincoln's speech. Those in Savannah and other Southern cities reacted much differently to his words than did those who were actually there to hear Lincoln speak them. News of his speech spread quickly through the streets of the city, and people reacted with fierce Southern patriotism. Far from being receptive to his gentle words, instead they heard a "declaration of war." Neighbors talking amongst themselves vowed to "fight for [their] liberties!"¹⁰⁶

The spring of 1861 brought another change to John's life. After an extended illness on a sweltering spring day, his father died. With the death of George Ash, his property would be divided five ways between each of his children and his widow, Sarah Ash. This left the young John at a distinct disadvantage. George and Sarah Ash married late in life after their first spouses passed away. Because of this, John was the youngest of the Ash children by twenty years. His older brothers already held their own properties. With the division of the property that had previously benefited John, he was left with only one-sixth of his father's estate.

In the few months between his dismissal from one regiment and his enrollment in the next, John likely spent time recovering from his illness, grieving his father, and planning his next move. He also found time for courtship. Estella Powers still held his attention captive. She was a frequent visitor to Savannah, and John visited Whitesville just as often. The Central of Georgia railroad tracks that connected the two towns, only thirty miles apart, made the jaunt into the country quite convenient.

¹⁰⁶ Mercer, March 4, 1861.

On November 9, 1861, John took the night train from Whitesville back to Savannah. A Yankee fleet had sailed into sight from the coastline of Georgia's sea islands, and the city of Savannah was in quite an uproar. As many residents fled the city, John resolved to return to military service to aid in the defense of his city. The next afternoon John joined the Georgia Hussars, Company B. The commanders of that regiment made quick work of assigning him to a guard post that same evening.¹⁰⁷

Unlike some of the new regiments quickly formed in response to demand, the Georgia Hussars enjoyed a long history of service in Savannah. Originally formed in 1736 by Oglethorpe, this company was a cavalry unit. While the affliction that John suffered which resulted in his discharge from the infantry regiment must have been painful, it was a stroke of luck. It was far better to be in a cavalry unit than an infantry regiment. A few days later on November 14, John purchased his first horse, a bay stallion, from Captain William H. Wiltberger for the price of \$300.¹⁰⁸

Infantry units like the Savannah Volunteer Guards and the Republican Blues were initially staffed with some of the wealthier men and their sons. Belonging to one of the historied regiments was considered a badge of honor and a rite of manhood. After the war began, when additional companies of infantry and cavalry were being formed, those who were more economically comfortable had the option of joining the cavalry. The less fortunate who couldn't afford to provide their own horse and equipment suffered the unpleasantness of marching on foot for the entirety of their service. With his recent

¹⁰⁷ Ash, November 9, 1861.

¹⁰⁸ Ash, November 14, 1861. George Brantley would later be discharge for being underage.

inheritance, John had money in the bank and rent from the property he owned, both real and human. While many of his friends had access to more family wealth than John, he was still much better off than many others.

John celebrated his eighteenth birthday on November 17, 1861, a week after enlisting with the Georgia Hussars. The next day, he signed his will in the event that he might lose his life in service with his regiment. Earlier in the summer, soldiers from Savannah had lost their lives while fighting at the Battle of Bull Run. His good friend, Eben Williams, witnessed the signing, along with three of his new comrades, George Brantley, Thomas Smith, and H. Stubbs. John's life wouldn't be in danger due to military action for quite some time. The bay stallion he purchased from Captain Wiltberger turned out to be the more immediate cause for concern. In a series of events spaced only a few days apart, John and the horse got acquainted quickly. The horse reared on him a couple of weeks after the signing of his will, and he only "narrowly escaped being crushed" by his horse. In a not so dramatic event the next day, the horse mashed John's right big toe when he stepped on it. These mishaps were likely caused by the free time that the soldiers enjoyed in camp. Barely a week after the mashing of the toe, John and his friends were racing down the road on horseback when a cow crossed in front of them. Why there was not ample time to react to the crossing of a cow is unclear, but John and his horse escaped injury after they both took a tumble avoiding the cow.¹⁰⁹

In the final weeks of 1861, John adjusted to life in camp. Fortunately for him, the Georgia Hussars were camped close enough to Savannah that a visit to town was not out of the question when he received leave. On these frequent visits to town, John spent time

¹⁰⁹ Ash, November 18-30, 1861.

at the post office both sending and receiving letters from Estella. She was not the only woman in his life. John's mother, as well as his aunts, cousins, and female friends, both young and old, frequently visited him in camp.

The impression John left in his journal of the first weeks of camp life is that it was somewhat more like a group of boys playing at being soldiers than men facing war for the first time. Drilling, parading, racing, setting up tents, visiting home, and being called upon by groups of "ladies" at camp made for a pleasant time. John describes it all as "great fun." Monotony had yet to set in.

Mild weather endured in the first part of December 1861, but as Christmas neared, a cold snap hit. After John was detailed for duty on a cold night, he thought his "toes were almost froze." Despite this first taste of the reality of what would be four years living outdoors, the month ended on a jolly note with Christmas. The "boys in camp" celebrated with eggnog. Some of them became drunk, but John judged that they "carried it off quietly."¹¹⁰

With the dawn of the new year, John had been a soldier for only a few months. Much of that time had been spent camped near Savannah where he enjoyed visits from his mother, aunts, cousins, and friends. When January of 1862 began, it didn't seem like life would be greatly altered. Slowly, reality crept up on his adventurous jaunt into military life.

John was included in the regiments of men camped on the outskirts of the city of Savannah, sleeping in tents and experiencing the joys and annoyances of the brotherhood created as they all slept, ate, and drilled together. Their captain was William Wiltberger,

¹¹⁰ Ash, December 25, 1861.

who was the owner of the Pulaski House, considered the finest hotel in they city. He also the owned the rural Bonaventure estate that had once belonged to the Tattnall family. Among its hoary oaks, a new cemetery for the city's more affluent deceased had been formed. The lesser officer positions were up for grabs and were to be chosen by ballots cast amongst the men.

On New Years' Day, the first company election was held in John's company of the Georgia Hussars. The evening before, John gifted his mess with two dozen eggs to go along with the sugar and liquor they purchased to make eggnog. Perhaps his contribution was simply in celebration of the holiday, but it served a dual purpose. An educated, ambitious young man, John was thinking of the election to be held the following morning. Having just observed the rituals of the 1860 presidential election the previous year, he knew that alcohol was a regular part of campaigning.¹¹¹

The drinking of the men the night before likely exacerbated tensions they felt about election. Before the election could be held, the company first performed their routine of drilling. Some of the men apparently couldn't wait to cast their ballots but began jostling for position first thing. Two of the men took the electioneering beyond words, and one was literally knocked to the ground. After drilling, votes were cast. John received 8 votes for the position of 5th Sergeant after two ballots were cast. Lacking a majority, he then withdrew in favor of the new 5th Sergeant, Phil Yonge.

Capping off the day of drama among the Georgia Hussars as the men elected minor leaders amongst themselves was the arrest of a soldier. Private George Arnett was reluctant to end the drinking festivities of the holiday and the election and was found to

¹¹¹ Ash, January 1, 1862.

be drunk late in the night. Despite the relatively short length of time the men had been camped near Savannah, this was his fourth offence. As punishment, he was to be confined to camp for a month. This incident illustrates that while a certain amount of drinking was expected among men, military discipline was the rule. Drinking was expected to be discrete, and drunkenness would not be tolerated. The Hussars enjoyed their proximity to Savannah, yet its nearness tempted the men to misbehave.¹¹²

Two days later, following a 24-hour shift as mounted guard, John rewarded himself by requesting a few hours leave to go to town. There he ran into his cousin, Lizzie, who had just returned from a trip to “the country” by train. The country consisted of Screven and Effingham counties where the Ash family had relatives. While there, Lizzie must have spent time with Estella, John’s friend who was slowly becoming his sweetheart. Estella, doing a little courting of her own, had made a palmetto hat and sent it by Lizzie for John. The gift of the handsome palmetto hat warmed John’s heart and directed more of his attention toward her. When he proudly wore the hat on a trip to town to purchase fodder for the regiment’s horses, it was the focal point for conversation among the people he encountered. He shyly recorded in his journal that “all admired it and some desired to have it.”¹¹³

In the afternoon before John returned to camp, his mother gave him \$150. Even though he was 18 and no longer a minor, she remained the guardian over the portion of his father’s estate that John inherited a year before. After returning to camp, Captain Wiltberger prepared his company and marched them through town on parade to accept a

¹¹² Ash, January 2, 1862.

¹¹³ Ash, January 11, 1862.

flag that Lieutenant Richard Davant's wife had made to present to her husband's company. The women of Savannah proudly supported the men in their families as they served to preserve the newly formed Confederacy.¹¹⁴

John's life developed a new rhythm as he adapted to the tempo of camp life as a soldier in the cavalry unit camped near Savannah. New sights, smells, and sounds became common as men lived in tents in close company with one another. Long, monotonous days of guard duty punctuated by the free hours of personal time became the norm. Men crowded together in cramped living quarters learned to live together and to make the best of their more rugged lives by finding new ways to enjoy themselves. At times, their unique personalities caused explosive confrontations.

Death, while not necessarily more prevalent than before the war began, was closer to the men and became an accepted part of camp life. Early in January, a young man serving in the Effingham Hussars died. A squadron was formed to escort his lifeless body to the train to be returned to his family. Despite the nearness of death or maybe because of it, the women still visited camp. Strolling with their men from one encamped regiment to another transformed a lowly physical activity into a social occasion to be looked forward to. While many of the men removed from town to the camps were further from family, rural relatives brought nearer to town by living with their regiments enjoyed a new closeness. Promenading among the troops may have been a subconscious attempt to normalize the new way of things.

¹¹⁴ Ash, January 4, 1862.

Because of the proximity of camp to town, John frequently visited his family, often dining at his brother's home. The regiments made a show of parading around the city and competing with one another for prizes as they drilled. On one of these visits, John ran into Miss Fannie Heidt, a friend of Estella's, which left him longing for Estella. His feelings for her were becoming stronger and more intimate. Despite the knowledge that his mother would read each of his journals as he filled the pages and returned them to her, John still wrote of the "sweet dream" he had of Estella and her kisses that night.¹¹⁵

It had been at least two months since John had last seen his young friend. It was from the small village of Whitesville that John had made the dash back to Savannah to join the Georgia Hussars in November when Yankee gunboats had first been sighted along the Georgia coast. The imminent attack that had caused many of the citizens of Savannah to flee and John to return to help defend the city still hadn't materialized. Camp commitments had kept John from traveling to the country, and Estella had not been able to visit Savannah, but their letters to one another slowly increased.

His duties took him to serve on picket post duty at Bonaventure the next day. In the morning, as he gathered his things to take on his 24-hour assignment, he included two of his treasured possessions: his journal and materials to write to Estella during his down time. Long, dark hours of standing watch at picket post could be broken by writing notes on the events of the day in his little book. Journaling often feels as if one is writing to a shadow of themselves, a sort of inward communication. In writing to Estella and others back home, John was paying forward. As they received letters from him, they wrote back to him giving him news of their lives. Whether stuck whiling away hours in camp with

¹¹⁵ Ash, January 8, 1862.

his fellow soldiers or on duty, reading and writing broke the hours of monotony. Words on paper, whether his own or those of others, brightened John's inner world.

When his long picket duty ended, John went home to refresh himself before returning to camp. While there, his horse decided that he had enough with the long stretch of away time from his camp home and ran off, leaving John to fend for himself.¹¹⁶

Then, as now, winter in Georgia was deceitful. Shortened days of mild weather lulled its residents into believing there will be no winter. Comfortable and snug in knowing that spring was only weeks away, the slumbering residents were then shocked by a sudden, severe cold snap. In mid-January, misty, drizzling weather appeared on the horizon, and the men camped in canvas tents began to dread the impending freeze. Routine drills were cancelled, but picket and guard duty were not. John was detailed for Isle of Hope the next day.¹¹⁷

Military leaders chose this time of freezing rain to give orders to remove from their camp near Savannah to a position along Thunderbolt Road about seven miles outside of town to what became known as Camp Cumming. John took the morning off to go home to take care of things in preparation for the move. When the companies of Georgia and Effingham Hussars arrived at their new location after their wet march, the first thing they did was prepare a hot dinner and pitch their tents.

After they had made themselves comfortable in their new encampment, they spent the evening around campfires and in tents expressing their indignation at being forced to move. The men made no effort to hide their displeasure as they grumbled toward their

¹¹⁶ Ash, January 12, 1862.

¹¹⁷ Ash, January 14 & 15, 1862.

immediate leaders. The rainy, cold weather surely ignited their passions further, but it seemed as if they had forgotten they had joined the military of the Confederacy in order to defend their state from an impending Federal attack. They spent part of the cold January laboring in the mud, clearing rubbish from the campsite and building stalls for their horses to live in. Camp Cumming would be their new home for the near future.¹¹⁸

Following one of these long days working in the “sloppy weather,” John was detailed with Sgt. Phillip Yonge and several other men to stand guard at the long bridge that connected the Isle of Hope and Skidaway. Unfortunately for the band of soldiers, the weather refused to relent. The men spent a miserable night near the river, shivering as the wind cut inside their coats and whipped around their heads, causing them to fear they might freeze before the sun rose again.¹¹⁹

Late the next afternoon, as John recuperated in his tent back at Camp Cumming after being relieved from his long stretch of picket duty, he reminisced about a dream he’d recently had where he and Estella had married. The memory of the dream and the feelings it inspired warmed him in the face of the blustery weather.¹²⁰

After the rain subsided, it was still very cold. In great appreciation of the clear weather, John spent a relaxed day in camp relieved that he wasn’t assigned picket duty. In the afternoon, he passed the time chasing a pig and duck hunting. He succeeded at catching neither pig nor duck. In the evening, John found a group to play cards with until

¹¹⁸ Ash, January 18, 1862.

¹¹⁹ Ash, January 22, 1862.

¹²⁰ Ash, January 23, 1862.

bedtime.¹²¹ All too often, weather manipulated the tenor of John's days. Nearing the end of January and having survived the cold snap combined with incessant rain while living in a canvas tent seven miles from Savannah, John had been busy with assigned picket duties and thoughts of Estella.

On January 26, after a couple of days of reprieve, John was again assigned to picket duty on the long bridge. In contrast to the previous nights of working to survive the fierce winter weather, the guards this night was preoccupied with their duties. "There is great expectation of a fight," John recorded. Tensions were high as the night wore on. John's picket made way for Wright's Legion. Their neighbor company marched to Skidaway Battery to reinforce other soldiers stationed there. Fifteen Yankee vessels had been spotted off the coast of Georgia, and the Confederates prepared for an expected fight.¹²²

The next morning the "Yankee boats" were still in sight from John's location on Skidaway Bridge. They feared that Federal troops were disembarking on Wilmington Island in preparation for attack. As his picket duty ended, he returned to camp to learn that he had been detailed along with thirty other men to stand guard on Montmollin Point on the Isle of Hope. Because of his picket duty, John had been left behind. He hurriedly prepared his things to accompany a wagon of provisions to join the other twenty-nine men. When an exhausted John arrived at Montmollin Point he discovered that there were

¹²¹ Ash, January 24, 1862.

¹²² Ash, January 26, 1862.

no tents or quarters to shelter the men from the elements That night, John slept on the cold ground, reclining on the post in the crook of a fence.¹²³

The next day John remained at his post on the Isle of Hope. From there, he and his companions could still see the invading boats “cruising” the waters around them. At about noon on January 28th, Commander Josiah Tattnall, escorted provisions to the Confederate troops who had taken Fort Pulaski at the beginning of the war. While in route to the fort on Cockspur Island, “Yankee gun boats fired on him from Wilmington River.” John described the plumes of smoke and the burst of the shells that were visible from the Isle of Hope.¹²⁴

That evening after dinner, John received a new assignment, to a picket post on Grimball’s Bluff, “lying at the northwestern end of the Isle of Hope on the marshes and creeks that run from the wide Skidaway River.” During the night, the men stayed awake, wary. Their wakefulness was forced by the nearness of enemy forces and the lack of knowledge about where they planned to attack.¹²⁵

On the morning of January 30, after three days of active duty, John returned to camp. Idle in camp, his thoughts turned to his comfort. Concerned with the affairs of his mess, he rode on a borrowed horse to Montmollin Point. James C. Thompson had taken John’s horse to town to be shod. After John cleared up his concerns and returned to camp, he waited for Thompson to return to camp with his horse. The hours passed and at nine o’clock that evening, Thompson had failed to reappear in camp. John and Captain

¹²³ Ash, January 27, 1862.

¹²⁴ Ash, January 28, 1862.

¹²⁵ Georgia Writer’s Project, *Drums and Shadows* (1940). <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/das/das16.htm> Accessed April 12, 2017.

Wiltberger felt “uneasy” about the prolonged absence, and the Captain allowed John to leave camp to go to Savannah. On his way, John went as far as Cashol Cemetery, but there he met his returning friend and horse. Together, they returned to Camp Cumming.¹²⁶

Months spent together and the approach of the enemy had transformed the encampment of Georgia Hussars from a friendly group who practiced drills into a group of men more aware of the potential dangers of the nearby Federal troops. Day to day concerns and the tug of family and friends were still there, but a new seriousness began to emerge in John’s writing as he recorded the events of each day. As February dawned, the Union vessels near Camp Cumming had increased to seventeen in number.¹²⁷

Still, when an attack did not materialize as expected, monotony began to creep back into the lives of the soldiers. Estella occupied much of John’s thoughts as he wrote letters to her and received her replies. Food was also on John’s mind. Away from home, he had formed a mess with a few other men in his camp. Together they provided the supplies for meals. John often hunted for fowl, squirrels, and pigs near camp. An enslaved man brought to camp by another soldier in the company prepared their daily meals.¹²⁸

When John spent time away from camp on picket duty, he brought along food from camp to eat. His picket posts were often near bodies of water. While on guard, he and his companions would supplement their meals with oysters. Following the pleasure

¹²⁶ Ash, January 30, 1862.

¹²⁷ Ash, February 1, 1862.

¹²⁸ Ash, February 4, 1862.

of a mid-morning oyster snack, John became bored. He and his friends entertained themselves by tying tin kettles to the tails of goats and laughing as they attempted to escape the clatter.¹²⁹

Returning to camp after picket duty, John skipped out on sabre drill so that he could cut marsh grass to feed his horse. This was the first time that John recorded a shirking of duties. Though his absence was excused, the behavior of six drunken men in camp on the same day was not overlooked. They were arrested and placed in the guard tent. Like the first disciplinary incident that John wrote of following the New Years' Day election, Captain Wiltberger was intent on showing the men his firmness when they stepped out of line.¹³⁰

On February 8, John and two others were detailed to stand picket at Grimball's place. They rode their horses to the assigned locations. After they spread their blankets and made their horses comfortable, the men settled in for an evening of roasting oysters and taking turns standing guard while the others slept. During the night, the rain returned. This time the men were better prepared to withstand the elements as they took shelter in a bathhouse near their picket post.¹³¹

When John returned to camp the next day, the rain continued. Because the downpour was fierce, the drills of camp were canceled. In the middle of the storm, John's tent mate, Jack Jenkins, took advantage of the cover of weather and canceled drills to slip away from camp and go to town. As Jack hurriedly returned to camp, he was forced to

¹²⁹ Ash, February 5, 1862.

¹³⁰ Ash, February 6 & 7, 1862.

¹³¹ Ash, February 8, 1862.

leave his saddle, bridles and overcoat in the bushes near camp in an attempt to avoid detection. Another fellow, Bulloch Jackson, discovered the equipment and went about camp “seeking the owner.” Because of this, Captain Wiltberger found out about the missing man. He commanded that the saddle could be taken to his tent so he could discover who had left camp without permission. Jack, not wanting to be caught and punished, waited for the Captain to leave his tent unattended. He hastily grabbed his things and ran to a neighboring regiment, the Bulloch Troops, to exchange it for one of theirs.

Jack luckily made the swap just in time. When Captain Wiltberger returned to camp, he ordered the Georgia Hussars to assemble and present their saddles so that he could find the missing one. When the culprit failed to be caught by his plan, he became angry and swore that if he found out who had tricked him, he would court martial him and make sure he was harshly punished.

John described the event in great detail and ended the story with these words. “This affair plainly indicated the feeling of persecution towards his men, that characterizes Capt. Wiltberger. Up to tonight, as I hope ever will be the case, the affair remains still a mystery with the officers, and all the men sympathize with Jack.” His description of the event reveals the resentment that these privileged men, most of them slaveholders, felt at submitting to the authority of military life. Many of them were for the first time away from the comforts of home and family, frequently exposed to the elements, and in no mood to deal with restrictions on their behavior.¹³²

The next morning another of John’s tent mates, T. Smith, woke John at 4:30 in the

¹³² Ash, February 10, 1862.

morning as he was coming back into the tent. Smith had also skipped camp to go to Savannah, but unluckily for him, the pickets of another regiment had caught him upon his return. He was allowed to go to camp but was afraid that the captain would learn of his wrongdoing. At morning drill, only 18 men appeared. John left the drama of camp to serve a twenty-four-hour stint of guard duty on picket at Skidaway Long Bridge. While there, he cut some palmetto to send to Estella so that she could make him another hat. He also wrote to his mother and cousin, Lizzie.¹³³

When John returned to camp, he dropped into bed, weary from his guard duty. The next morning, he complained of being again assigned to Skidaway Long Bridge even though the captain had said that he would make arrangements to give the men more free time. Again, while he was on duty, regiments crossed to bridge to reinforce the battery, as the Federal vessels were still present in the bay. As General Hugh Mercer coordinated the movement of various companies of soldiers from one coastal location to the other, reinforcing the batteries that had been set up to protect Savannah, the men concluded that the Federal vessels they saw in the bay intended to attack their city.¹³⁴

This time, when he was relieved from guard duty and returned to camp, it was Valentine's Day. John celebrated the day by writing to Estella, but he lamented that due to war, he didn't get to observe the holiday as before. A heavy downpour of rain accompanied the gloom he felt. He awoke the next morning feeling unwell. When he was

¹³³ Ash, February 11, 1862.

¹³⁴ Ash, February 12 & 13, 1862.

informed that he was again detailed for picket, he told the 1st Sgt. that he had not intended to report sick, but that he would rather do that than to go out of camp on guard duty.¹³⁵

The rain continued, and when he woke up the next morning, he felt even worse. Reporting sick again, he visited the doctor's tent, where opium and other pills were prescribed for him. Initially, he had no intention of taking the medicine. As he lay in his tent, the rain pelting on the canvas, he changed his mind. Despite taking the pills at three separate points during the day, John suffered a fever during the night.

When morning came, he felt no better. This time, the doctor visited his tent. John took castor oil to work off the pills he had taken the previous day. His sudden illness had caused him to be quite weak, and he felt unable to leave the comfort of his bed all day. The next morning, he managed to eat a biscuit for breakfast. Nourishment helped him to feel a little better, but he again stayed in bed most of the day. A letter from Estella informing him that she would be in Savannah on Friday, only three days from then, made him determined to recover so that he could seek leave to meet her in Savannah.¹³⁶

On Thursday, though he felt much better, he still reported sick and spent the day in camp fixing up a stable for his horse and trying to find decent water to drink. He blamed bad water for his illness. While lack of potable water could have contributed to his illness, constant exposure to the elements and lack of rest also punished his body.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ash, February 14 & 15, 1862.

¹³⁶ Ash, February 16-18, 1862.

¹³⁷ Ash, February 19, 1862.

On Friday, John reported well in the morning and went on drill. Captain Wiltberger allowed him to leave camp in the afternoon. He reached town a little after dark. Rushing home to make himself presentable, he then walked to Mrs. Nungazer's house where Estella always stayed while in Savannah. They visited until midnight, then he returned home to sleep.¹³⁸

Before returning to camp in the afternoon of the next day, John busied himself running errands in town. First he had his hair trimmed and arranged his accounts. Then he called on his oldest sister, Susannah Patterson. Afterwards, he went to see Estella and made a quick visit to his cousin Lizzie before leaving for camp at 11:30. When he arrived at camp at 1 o'clock, he immediately reported unfit for duty again.

As John slept safely in his tent that night, some of his comrades were unlucky. Lieutenant Colonel Montgomery Cumming had also visited Savannah. Riding the dark road back to camp, he encountered a squad of Georgia Hussars. Assuming that they had not received leave for their absence, when he returned to camp, he raised an alarm. The officers turned the men out to call roll and found that eight men were missing. Extra pickets were assigned guard duty in an attempt to catch the men as they returned to camp. Six men were arrested, but two of them managed to slip into camp undetected. The six men arrested remained in the guard tent. No doubt, the officers wished to manage the absence of the men and cut down on those who "ran the blockade" to go to town. John remained on sick report for the remainder of the week.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ash, February 20, 1862.

¹³⁹ Ash, February 22-25, 1862.

Even though he was still a little sick, he went out to cut poles to repair his horse's stable. While he was out, Estella and Lizzie, accompanied by young men, arrived at camp to see him. Not finding him there, they continued to the Battery at Skidaway. While Estella and Lizzie were out, John said it "rained in torrents," and the girls were exposed to the elements while riding. As they began their return trip to Savannah, they again stopped by Camp Cumming to visit John. Joining him in his tent, the young women gathered their sodden skirts around them and chatted for awhile before they left. He gave them each jasmine and palmetto as a gift.¹⁴⁰

On the last day of February, John reported fit for duty and was assigned as picket at Skidaway Long Bridge. He had been sick for nearly half of February. In his time of recuperation, he had seen Estella twice. He also made great progress in preparing a snug stable for his horse. The same day he reported fit for duty, Lt. Col. Cumming publicly read the sentences of the blockade runners before the assembled regiment and arrested one of them again for his insolence in failing to answer to his name. In doing so, Cumming demonstrated that disobedience, absence, and insolence within the military would not be tolerated.

Saturday, March 1st began with rumors circulating around Camp Cumming. By evening that day, they were confirmed. The Georgia Hussars were reassigned to General Hugh W. Mercer's quarters on Skidaway Island to serve as a guard detail for him. They thought in a few days' time, they would strike camp and leave for their new destination. Early on Sunday morning, the men began to pack up their belongings in preparation for

¹⁴⁰ Ash, February 26, 1862.

the move. The orders had yet to be given. Their prescience turned out to be a good thing. At ten o'clock the transportation wagons began to arrive for them.¹⁴¹

By noon, most of the company was packed, loaded, and ready to move to their new location. John was one of two men that was left behind to stay with the remaining baggage. The hours dragged on, and the wagons did not return for the two of them until very late at night. However, the Bulloch Troop graciously allowed them to take their dinner at their camp. John and the other fellow slept near the guard house.¹⁴²

On Monday morning, around nine o'clock, they rode with the baggage and the wagons and arrived at Skidaway at two in the afternoon. The five-hour ride, followed by arranging things at the new camp, left John considerably weary at the end of the day. That night he slept in his tent. Outside, a cold, high wind whistled through the treetops, the boughs shaking in its wake.¹⁴³

In addition to being camped in a new location, the following two days brought a couple of significant changes to John's camp life. He took on a new role within his regiment. The officers assigned him to work as a courier at General Mercer's headquarters. All day, he rode his horse briskly from one company to another, passing along communication between the colonels and General Mercer. Such a change was a good thing for John. It indicated that the officers considered him trustworthy and dependable.

¹⁴¹ Ash, March 1, 1862.

¹⁴² Ash, March 2, 1862.

¹⁴³ Ash, March 3, 1862.

The second significant change was more personal in nature. Henry Wade, John's good friend from earlier days in Savannah, enlisted with the Georgia Hussars. A few days earlier, John had submitted a petition that Henry be allowed to join the regiment, and it was granted. In response to Henry's arrival in camp, John left his former tent mates and set up a tent with Henry and Horace Heidt. Henry and John enjoyed the greatest bond of friendship within the group, but John greatly admired Horace. Horace, like Estella, had roots in Effingham County.¹⁴⁴

The beginning of March may have kindled hopes of warmer weather for the hundreds of men camped outside Savannah. Winter had one last gasp of breath before it gave over to spring. Had the soldiers been snug in their own homes, they probably wouldn't have minded. In the camps, only the officers lived in real houses. Privates made homes of canvas tents with premade wooden floors. Still, even these provided shelter and comfort in contrast to exposure to the elements that those on picket duty endured.

After morning drill on Thursday, March 6, John was ordered on picket duty to take the place of a man who had fallen ill. As he saddled his horse and rode the three miles from camp to Adam's Point to begin his 24 hours of duty, he dreaded it. Waterways surround both the east and west side of Skidaway, and Adam's Point was on the narrow southern end of the island. John wrote in the pages of his journal, "the wind blew very hard during the day." With Adam's Point being so near the water, the effect the cold had on the men intensified. As wind swept across the water absorbing moisture, the men felt its icy sting. Having no tent and thinking of how much colder it would be once the sun set, John and the men on duty with him made a low hut of brush.

¹⁴⁴ Ash, March 4 & 5, 1862.

When night had fallen, it began to rain. The men alternated watch every three hours. John's turn came at three in the morning. He made a valiant effort to withstand the terrible, combined cold of rain and wind, but he could only make it through an hour before he thought he would freeze to death. "I therefore went to our hut and laid down, and watched no more. We all kept very close on account of the wind, and when the relief came they found us still there." Huddled together with the other men to keep warm, John survived the worst night of service since he had enlisted in November.¹⁴⁵

Henry greeted John as he rode back to camp the next morning with a letter from Estella. Over the weekend, John wrote a letter back to Estella. His horse had become ill, so he couldn't participate in mounted duty. News reached the camp of an encounter between Confederate pickets and a "boat load of Yankees." When the Federals came near a spot identified on maps known as Waring's place, the pickets near the shore fired over water at them. They couldn't confirm any injuries or fatalities, but the boat was forced to leave the area.¹⁴⁶

The Federals withdrew, but Confederate military leaders worried over the best strategy to protect Savannah from an attack. Popular opinion held that Fort Pulaski was an impenetrable fortress. Even if the Federals took Tybee Island and aimed artillery at the fort, Georgia's officials assumed that the fort could withstand an attack. Protecting Savannah was their main concern. They had already abandoned Tybee, and they thought that it would be wise to leave the outer circle of defense. Instead, forces would be concentrated nearer the city. In light of their concerns, it's no wonder that John overheard

¹⁴⁵ Ash, March 6, 1862.

¹⁴⁶ Ash, March 8, 1862.

rumors circulating in camp that the Georgia Hussars would soon be ordered to withdraw from Skidaway Island. While he doubted that the rumors were true, he recorded them anyway.¹⁴⁷

Monday brought a return to regular duty. Following sabre drill, John heard news that confirmed the rumors of the day before. His disbelief of the previous day was promptly reversed. Heavy artillery had already been removed from Skidaway battery. Palmetto logs replaced them, meant to give the enemy the impression that the guns were still there. This would cover the evacuation of troops so that they wouldn't be attacked in their weakened condition.¹⁴⁸

In the lull between bursts of activity, soldiers filled their lives the best they could as they whiled away hours in camp away from their homes and loved ones. John was officially a man, living among other men of all ranges of maturity. Military life and the death of his father had matured him to a degree, but he was still a teenager. In many ways he thought and behaved as someone trying on manhood for the first time. As all teenagers do, he wanted his outward appearance to be an expression of his inward identity. John had grown a beard that covered his chin. It looked like an overgrown, bushy goatee.

On a day filled with rumors but with nothing to occupy himself but writing letters, John must have been bored. Experimenting with his identity and attempting to entertain himself during the empty hours of a camp day, he shaved his beard and marveled at the drastic change of his looks.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ash, March 9, 1862.

¹⁴⁸ Ash, March 10, 1862.

¹⁴⁹ Ash, March 11, 1862.

Even with the lulls, military activity at the coastal outposts increased. Every day brought news and rumors of clashes between the Confederate and Union troops at one point or another. John was again assigned picket duty at Adam's Point. En route, he and his companion, Mr. Gifford, stopped in at a house that had been reassigned as a medical hospital. Men from the 4th Louisiana Battalion were recuperating there.

In the makeshift field hospital, a doctor performed a post-mortem examination on a soldier with the 4th Louisiana Battalion who had been killed the night before. John wanted to watch. The sight of the doctor sawing off the top of the dead man's skull disturbed John more than he had expected, and he soon continued on his way to his picket post. A soldier from the deceased man's company was assigned to stand watch with John that night. Joseph Dawson, who had spent several years in Savannah earlier must have felt like he visiting a familiar place. As such, he felt comfortable entertaining the group with stories of how the soldier had died and his own previous brush with Yankee pickets in Virginia.

The man who now lay cold and mutilated in a hospital under a doctor's knife had tangled with another enlisted man in his company months earlier while in Virginia. Besting his opponent physically, he won the fight. But the beaten man didn't forget what happened. He had spent months nursing his grudge and biding his time. When he found his victim drunk and alone, he recruited two of his friends. Together they attacked the drunken soldier with wooden billets and beat him so badly that he died before the end of the night.

For John the stories Joseph shared with him during the night, grisly though they were, made a long night more bearable. Tales of Joseph's encounter with the enemy distracted them from the dreadful sand flies and mosquitoes which pestered him. The stinging nuisances wouldn't have allowed him to sleep if he had tried. When he was relieved from duty, he returned to camp to rest and answer Estella's letter.¹⁵⁰

Great gusts of wind blew into camp while John spent the day at the battery in General Hugh Mercer's vicinity to deliver dispatches to other commanders in the area. At the end of the day when he returned, he found that his tent had been ripped by the gale and was useless. Late that night, John and Henry found lodging at a neighboring camp with the City Light Guards.¹⁵¹

Despite the scramble to find shelter the previous night, John woke feeling well rested. That was a good thing because there was "a great stir on Skidaway in the moving line," The men of John's unit were again ordered to pack their things and prepare to move to a new defensive position. Confederate commanders desperately attempted to prepare for an impending Federal attack. The men spent the day packing and waiting on supply wagons to arrive. They had all but given up hope, when they heard "the rattling of empty wagons" coming their way at nine o'clock that night.¹⁵²

John and his friends worked quickly loading their things into the wagon. By 9:45 the wagons were loaded, and the men followed the creaking wagons through the darkness of night on their way to a new campsite. From Camp Read they rode until around

¹⁵⁰ Ash, March 14 & 15, 1862.

¹⁵¹ Ash, March 16, 1862.

¹⁵² Ash, March 17, 1862.

midnight they arrived on the Isle of Hope. The soldiers demonstrated their efficiency in the hope for rest before daylight. In need of sleep, they slept on the ground and waited for the sun to rise so that they could set up their tents again. Henry and John built a bunk in their new tent for the two of them to share.

Eben Williams, another of John's boyhood friends, also joined the Georgia Hussars. Henry, John, and Eben frequently enjoyed one another's company while in camp. In addition to spending free time together, the three formed a sort of family unit. They helped each other with camp chores and running errands into town, since they were seldom on leave at the same time.¹⁵³

Two of John's other close friends from what must have seemed like long-ago school days joined other regiments in the rush to enlist after Georgia seceded. Tom Wragg and Albert "Abba" Bacon had enlisted in other regiments. By the spring of 1862, John, Henry, and Eben were still camped near Savannah not having seen any combat. The opposite was true for Tom and Abba, whose regiments had been ordered to Virginia.

Near the end of March, John received leave to go into Savannah on a Sunday afternoon. Along the road to town, he encountered Wilson's regiments as they were marching back to camp. They had received orders to leave for South Carolina, but were called back before they could board the train. When John attended services at the Baptist church that evening, he likely overheard many of his fellow worshippers express concern that the enemy would soon attack the city. Yankee boats cruising off the coast of Georgia generated worried talk and rumors.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ash, March 22, 1862.

¹⁵⁴ Ash, March 23, 1862.

On Monday, John returned to camp. Following all the talk that swirled around town the day before, he recorded the first brush with Yankees along the riverbank. Fifteen Federal soldiers disembarked to scout out the area near the Confederate batteries at Thunderbolt. Two Confederates on picket spotted them and fired in their direction. The Union soldiers did not return fire, but they did return to their boat.¹⁵⁵

Being shot at by the troops stationed on Skidaway must not have scared the Northern soldiers too much. If anything, the shooting may have inspired them to return to repay the Confederates for the indignity of being fired upon. The next day, they returned to dish out a little indignity of their own. Rather than just fifteen men, fifty soldiers left the boats and came ashore, using the big guns aboard to cover their arrival. In the face of the arsenal on board the boats, the Confederate pickets quickly scattered, not pausing to take anything with them. Intent on making a point, the “villains” as John called them, tore up a tent, stole a canteen, set fire to the battery, and ran up the United States flag atop a house.

The pickets who had run returned with reinforcements and the Yankees “took to their heels” and retreated to their boat rather than sticking around to skirmish with the Confederates. Captain I.E. Dawson, a member of General Mercer’s personal staff, went to the house to remove the flag. After he had done so, he set fire to the house and to provisions that were stored nearby. Why Captain Dawson chose to burn the house that had previously been used as a hospital is a mystery. Did the Confederates believe that the house could be confiscated and used by the Federals in some way? Was the placing of the United States flag such an insult to his honor that the house had to be burned to clear the

¹⁵⁵ Ash, March 24, 1862.

memory of it? That same evening, General Mercer called for a detachment from each unit camped nearby to form a body of soldiers to make a night expedition to Skidaway.¹⁵⁶

Since November of 1861, John had been camped near Savannah with the Hussars. After five months in camp, he was eager to be included in the first sign of military action. After managing to persuade a friend to take his place on his assigned guard duty, John rode along with thirty men from the Hussars who took part in the night expedition.

The men rode all night on the lookout for the enemy. Around three in the morning, they dismounted and slept on the ground for a couple of hours before returning to camp. In their vigilance after the previous encounter, they found no other sign that the Federals had been anywhere else on the island.¹⁵⁷ Disappointed and tired, John slept most of the day.

After this intense burst of activity, John, Horace, Henry, and Eben enjoyed a few days of rest during which they occupied themselves by exploring abandoned houses and milking stray cows. John, being ever earnest in his religious duties, found a small church near camp and attended a service. As he listened to the sermon, he was impressed by the delivery of it and commented on the young soldiers' skill in preaching. The solemn feelings that John felt at the exhortation of someone near his own age may have been the beginnings of his own stirrings to join the ministry.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ash, March 25, 1862.

¹⁵⁷ Ash, March 25, 1862.

¹⁵⁸ Ash, March 30, 1862.

But the new threat of the nearness of the Federal boats and the constant guessing of where they intended to land and what military outpost they might attack occupied much of John's and others' time. Picket duty became more dangerous. A Yankee scouting party that landed near the Battery captured an unwise soldier of the Bulloch Troop as a prisoner. Still, the possibility of encountering the enemy while on picket failed to dampen John's enjoyment of an oyster roast as he stood watch the same day.¹⁵⁹

Federal activity again interrupted camp activities a few days later. On April 2nd, John wrote his lengthiest entry in his journal up to that point. The Blue Caps, a neighboring regiment, reported that they believed Skidaway to have been infiltrated by a number of enemy troops. John quickly joined a company sent to scout the area and form a defense, with Lieutenant Richard Davant commanding them.

As the Confederate scouting party approached the battery, they saw what they thought was a company of Federal soldiers sounding their bugle as they formed to attack them. John immediately proposed that they should retreat rather than meeting the attack. The group slowly began a retreat as the other group advanced upon them. As they neared one another, they recognized the other group to be the Blue Caps. The proximity of Federal troops created tension and hyper vigilance, which sometimes led to false alarms. With these repeat false alarms, some of the men began to let their guard down and even believed that the Federal forces had no intention of attacking their fortifications.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Ash, March 31, 1862.

¹⁶⁰ Ash, April 2, 1862.

As the weather grew warmer, sandflies “plagued” the men.¹⁶¹ It may have seemed to them that the sharp bites of the sandflies were more of a nuisance than the “Yankees” would be. Charles Jones, who served with the Chatham Artillery on Skidaway, described things this way. “Trivial [these incidents] may now be regarded, and unimportant in their results – [they] show the constant alarms and the condition of readiness at any moment to meet the foe.”¹⁶²

The spring weather brought more than sandflies; it also signaled a return to social occasions in Savannah. Lieutenant Davant’s wife baked cakes and presented them to her husband’s company. Because there were eight messes and only two cakes, the men made a game of competing for the cakes, choosing representatives from each mess to charge and win a cake for their mess. Estella also wrote to John asking him to join her for a concert in Savannah. So many other men had already asked for leave to go to the concert that John wouldn’t be able to go, and he dreaded writing to tell her so.¹⁶³

The concert the young couple missed could have very well been the heavily advertised concert of the young pianist Thomas Wiggins. African-American and thirteen years old, Tom had been born blind to an enslaved family in Columbus, Georgia. As Tom progressed to toddlerhood, he exhibited strange behavior. Today, he would likely be diagnosed with autism. His mother pleaded with a neighbor, General James Bethune, to purchase her family to save her baby from a fate of a master unwilling to care for a disabled slave.

¹⁶¹ Ash, April 4, 1862.

¹⁶² Charles C. Jones, Jr. *The Chatham Artillery*, 64.

¹⁶³ Ash, April 3 & 7, 1862.

Growing up on the Bethune Farm, Tom was fascinated by the piano the general bought for his daughters to play. At first, the family shooed him away, but when they came in to find him playing a melody that he had overheard, they realized his potential. Tom was a talented savant with no need for formal musical training. By the age of six, Tom performed concerts in Georgia, accompanied by the agent, Perry Oliver. As his popularity soared, he also performed in Northern states. In 1861, when Southern states seceded from the Union, his agent felt safer returning to the South. He didn't want to risk the possibility of Tom obtaining freedom during shaky times.¹⁶⁴

The arrival of an enslaved celebrity to entertain in Savannah indicates that the citizens of the city behaved in much the same way a year into the war as they had while they were still a part of the United States. Though Georgia had seceded and Federal forces were off the coast, people still found time to attend concerts and other social events.

Billed in the *Daily Morning News*:

BLIND TOM!
 The Negro Boy Pianist,
 The Inspired Musician,
 The Wonder of the World,
 The Greatest Marvel on Earth,
 A Living Miracle,
 Will give four of his inimitable entertainments,
 At Masonic Hall,
 Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 o'clock
 The Battle of Manassas
 Performed by him every evening for seven weeks to thousands of delighted hearers.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Geneva Handy Southall, *Blind Tom, The Black Pianist-Composer, 1849-1908* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarcrow Press, Inc, 1999.)

¹⁶⁵ *Daily Morning News*, April 9, 1862.

In contrast, the return of Tom to perform in the South after the war began highlights the disruption to slavery that the conflict brought about. Since the inception of slavery, slaveholders felt comfortable crossing states lines and travelling with their human property into the free states. After the South seceded, it was safer to bring human property to where society supported the institution. His agent declared that by his musical composition, Tom supported the cause of the Confederacy. In reality, Tom simply continued to react to a world that due to his status as an enslaved child with severe disabilities he had no control over. His musical abilities gave him an outlet to express his emotions.¹⁶⁶

On April 8th, news of Confederate success at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee reached Savannah and the military camps on the coast. The men celebrated what they saw as a great victory even while they were saddened by the loss of General Albert Sidney Johnston, who died of a wound received in battle.¹⁶⁷

The next day, Captain William H. Wiltberger finally signed a 24-hour pass for John so that he could go see Estella. He rode his horse to Savannah, and from there boarded a train to Whitesville. Estella also had invited several female friends for a visit on the same occasion. The group of young people stayed up until two in the morning, attempting to take advantage of every hour available before John returned to camp. Estella and her friend Mary Holland awoke at five the next morning to walk John to the train station for his return to Savannah.

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.blindtom.org>. Accessed September 18, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Ash, April 8, 1862.

On his ride back to camp from Savannah on the Shell Road leading toward camp, John observed the beauty around him. Another soldier camped near him described the countryside in such an eloquent way that it still vividly brings to life a snapshot of the world as John and his comrades experienced an abrupt transition from peace to war over the next few days.

The winter was gone, and spring with genial smiles and soft influences had given to every tree its most attractive foliage, to every flower its sweetest perfumes, to the sky its purest tints, and to the ambient air its gentlest impulses. Everything in nature was arrayed and living green, and redolent of life and beauty. Even the low-lying marshes had shaken off the dull gray of winter, and were rejoicing in new life and vigor imparted by the swelling tide, and the clear sunbeams shedding their warmth and light over all. The scene was so tranquil, so full of nature and that serenity characteristic of her happiest hours, it was of all things most difficult to realize that the iron wheels of the chariot of war were thundering at our gates, and the lawless passions of men conspiring against the peace of their fellows, and the harmony of nature.¹⁶⁸

When John returned to camp on the morning of April 10, he was greeted by the “roar of cannon from the direction of Fort Pulaski.” No longer were the men guessing about the intended target of Federal forces. Now they knew. “The fight has no doubt begun in Georgia in earnest,” John thought as he lay on his bunk reading a book despite the “incessant booming of cannon.”¹⁶⁹

All through the night, the booming of the cannon could be heard. In the morning, the tempo of the firing increased until it ceased completely in the afternoon. John felt ill in the afternoon with an upset stomach. Perhaps anxiety caused his physical discomfort, as news had not yet reached the Hussars of the outcome of the fighting. Citizens in Savannah experienced that same uncertainty. They could hear the echoes of cannon from

¹⁶⁸ Jones, 66.

¹⁶⁹ Ash, April 10, 1862.

Tybee and Cockspur Islands and were desperate for news of what was going on. Tensions remained high in the city, yet the editors of the *Daily Morning News* declared optimistically that they thought it would be difficult if not impossible for the fort to fall.¹⁷⁰

“Fort Pulaski has fallen!” John wrote the next day, April 12, in the pages of his journal. No doubt that same sentence echoed in the ears of those who served with him and was written on many other pages of journals and letters to loved ones. Nothing else was a more important topic of conversations among the men in the camps. The thing they had feared had happened. The enemy had attacked and had been victorious. John and others thought that, “the Yankees will undoubtedly follow up this first decisive [victory] across our coast and push on to Savannah.”¹⁷¹

Despite Savannah’s proximity to the military encampments and Fort Pulaski itself, news was slow in reaching the city about the fate of the fort. The same day that John lamented the fall of Fort Pulaski, the *Daily Morning News* complained of a lack of reliable information concerning the results of the bombardment and the current status of the fort. Reports had reached its offices that it was the Confederate forces at the fort who had silenced their Federal attackers from Tybee.¹⁷²

For the next two days rumors and conjecture percolated through the city as bits of news floated in from the coast, no doubt received by letters from the soldiers and possibly from soldiers and others who visited. The *Daily Morning News* reported the surrender of

¹⁷⁰ *Daily Morning News*, April 11, 1862.

¹⁷¹ Ash, April 12, 1862.

¹⁷² *Daily Morning News*, April 12, 1862.

the fort and that its former occupants had been taken prisoner. Reflecting the emotions of those who read its pages, the editors observed that, “the weather yesterday was somber and gloomy, a perfect union with the general feeling among our citizens.”¹⁷³

Disbelief that the solidly built Fort Pulaski had fallen echoed across the South. A North Carolina newspaper expressed incredulity that the fort had been taken in less than forty-eight hours with no fatalities reported by those who defended her. It questioned the reliability of Pulaski’s long-range guns in failing to stall her attackers. It almost seems as if they suspected the reports of its surrender had been falsely circulated.¹⁷⁴

For the people who lived in Savannah, however, the reality of what had happened set in quickly. Many made plans to leave their homes in the city, taking their servants with them to the country. John’s mother, Sarah, quickly began to prepare to adjourn to Screven County. Governor Brown had once declared, “I would leave [Savannah] in smoking ruins when I was driven from it.” She didn’t know what to expect to happen next, but she was preparing for the worst.¹⁷⁵

When John heard the news from a fellow soldier who had visited Savannah that his mother was preparing to close up their city home and by travel to the country, he asked Captain Wiltberger for a permit to go to town. The captain refused permission. Many of his men were from Savannah, and he couldn’t keep his camp populated if he allowed all of his worried cavalymen to return to their homes to see their families. John insisted, and the Captain relented, generously giving him 18 hours leave. This was more

¹⁷³ *Daily Morning News*, April 14, 1862.

¹⁷⁴ *Daily Morning News*, April 15, 1862.

¹⁷⁵ Maurice Melton, *The Best Station of Them All: The Savannah Squadron, 1861-1865* (The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, AL 2012) p. 112.

than John expected.

Riding his mare through the dusk, John arrived in Savannah late that evening. He found his home dark, locked, and empty. In her panic, his mother had already left. Sarah had taken everything from the house except the furniture and locked it up securely. The twice-widowed and aging woman couldn't have managed that task alone. Packing the contents of the house into bags, baskets, or boxes, transporting them to the Central of Georgia station all the way across town, and loading them onto a train was no small undertaking. People she and John retained after her late husband's death did this job for her. Sally, Catharine, Rose, Jim, Phillis, Mary, Nelly, Ann, and Meshack all remained under Sarah's control.

Unlike other Confederate soldiers who brought servants from home to live in camp with them, John chose not to take advantage of that convenience. Jim, at nearly the same age as John, would have been the natural fit for that position. So all of the people remained at home with his mother. If they didn't live in the townhouse or in the carriage house, they lived in the city near Sarah. Like the white citizens of the town who overheard the boom of cannon attacking Fort Pulaski, the enslaved men, women, and children who worked in their homes also heard the Federal attack. The nearness of the invasion may have inspired equally strong emotional reactions among everyone in the city. White Savannahians felt fear at the thought of the city being invaded by their enemies.

Sally, Catharine and her children Rose and Jim, Phillis and her daughters Mary and Nelly, and Ann and Meshack worked under Sarah's direction. Their thoughts must have been going in many different directions as they prepared the contents of the Taylor

Street home for an evacuation from the city. They did so with the awareness that as they boarded the train to go to Screven County, they were moving further away from the possibility of liberation from slavery.

Due to the paucity of sources, understanding the lives of the slaves can be like peering through a thick fog. They had families, friends, and loved ones who were not held by the Ash family. It is likely that those they held dear to them also lived in the city. It's also possible that due to the frequency with which Sarah and John traveled from Savannah to Effingham and Screven counties, they had formed relationships with enslaved people who belonged to households in the country. Their lives in the city were uprooted because of Sarah's fear that the city would be attacked. Whether they were leaving those they cared about in the city or meeting them in the country can only be imagined.

In contrast to the fear of Savannah's whites, African American inhabitants of the city longed for their freedom. The proximity of the Federals on the islands of South Carolina and now Georgia represented hope that time was drawing near when freedom would be possible. For those who had been pressed into service at the command of Governor Joseph Brown on Cockspur Island, freedom came overnight. The day following the surrender of Fort Pulaski, Major General David Hunter issued General Order Number 7. Essentially, the order granted freedom to all the slaves on Cockspur Island. Only days before, the brick fort had stood as a symbol of Southern strength and defiance against the United States government. Now, with its crumbled walls, it shone as a beacon of liberty, for all the enslaved who lived near enough to imagine escaping to freedom.

Having found his home empty and his mother gone, John then went to his brother Charles's house, to ask after his mother. While there, his cousin Lizzie told him that Estella had just arrived in town. This news brought an end to a visit with his older brother's family. With quick steps, he retrieved a key to his home from Mrs. Barnwell, a neighbor, and went in to wash up. He couldn't find a change of clothes in the empty house, so he went "just as he was" to see Estella anyway.

Estella stayed at Mrs. Hungazer's, as was her custom when she visited Savannah. Her close friend, Fannie Heidt, was also there. John spent the evening with the young women. When he was about to excuse himself to return to his house, it began raining. Because of the change in weather and Sarah having taken all the bedding from John's home, the women invited John to stay overnight. They prepared a pallet for him on the parlor floor. Even in his haste to go home to check on his mother, he failed to catch her before she left. Estella's surprise visit was a consolation for John.

Sarah and Estella reacted very differently to the attack on Fort Pulaski. Their ages may have influenced their reactions. Sarah, nearing the age of 60 and recently widowed, didn't want to stay in the city as the enemy closed in. She chose to go to her family in the country. In contrast Estella chose to visit the city, just as many people who lived there were fleeing. She was like one who migrates to the scene of a hurricane while others evacuate. Her arrival in the city near where John was encamped also signaled a deepening of their relationship as it evolved from mere courtship to something more serious.¹⁷⁶ The much younger eighteen year-old Estella, who lived in the country, craved

¹⁷⁶ Ash, April 15, 1862.

the excitement that a trip to the city brought.

Despite their different reactions, Sarah and Estella were both women who held property of their own due to the death of a male family member. Estella's father, Zara Powers, had died two years earlier. She and her slightly younger sister Florida lived with their mother, Elvira Elkins Powers. The fifteen and seventeen-year-old sisters enjoyed the comforts of life that their departed father had left to them, without the restrictions that a father may have imposed on them. Archibald Guyton who had been the administrator of Zara Powers' estate may have looked out for the family of females, but they seem to have been fairly financially independent in 1862. Like Sarah, Estella also held a few enslaved people as part of her inheritance when her father died.

Their home was in Whitesville, Georgia, which would later be renamed Guyton in honor of Archibald Guyton. Whitesville was a small village with a railroad station only twenty-five miles from Savannah. Many of the people who lived in the villages' Victorian homes and attended its churches had roots either in Savannah or in the German Salzburg village of Ebenezer. From the Powers' home in Whitesville, Estella frequently boarded the train to and from Savannah, along with her sister Florida. Her friends Hattie Guyton, Fannie Guyton, and Fannie Dasher did the same.

But Savannah wasn't the only place that Estella visited. She also attended the Female College in Greensboro, Georgia. The trip to Greensboro by train was much lengthier than the short jaunt to Savannah from Whitesville, even though train was quicker than horseback. Journeying from Whitesville to Greensboro involved hours of railway time, punctuated by one or two overnight stays in Millen or Augusta along the way.

Like Estella, Sarah shared a familiarity with riding by rail. Sarah had been born in Screven County. Her family of origin, the Evans family, still lived there. Their rural home lay in a small community named Halcyondale, which was about halfway between the county seat of Sylvania and the small town of Newington. In relation to Whitesville, Halcyondale was about 50 or 60 miles further away from Savannah, but rail still connected the two. All of Sarah's life, she lived in either Screven County or Savannah, and while living in one place, made a habit of traveling for visits to the other.

Before John returned to camp, he and Estella exchanged their "likenesses." He tucked her daguerreotype in his pocket and rode back to camp where he was assigned picket duty at Adam's Point on Skidaway. That evening, he and the others on duty spent the pleasant spring evening catching crabs. Some of them they boiled, and some of them they roasted. When John slept, he dreamed of Estella and another young lady whose identity he didn't know. In his dream, he'd taken the train to Whitesville to visit Estella. When he arrived, the two "sweet tempered as angels" confronted him and asked him which of them he really loved. It seemed he'd mailed love letters to each of them, not knowing that the two knew one another.

Upon awakening, John explained to his journal how his dream must have come about because of the variations on Estella's name. Sometimes he wrote of her as Estille or Stella. The more likely explanation is the flurry of letters he exchanged with young ladies other than Estella. He had yet to formally declare himself to Estella, but he may have felt unsure of making that commitment.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ash, April 19, 1862.

A week after Fort Pulaski had fallen into the hands of the Federals, there was no sign that they had prepared for an immediate advance on Savannah. Feeling that imminent danger had passed, John's mother returned to Savannah. Sue Patterson wrote a letter to John informing him of her return. The letter interrupted the monotony of camp life where John moseyed about picking blackberries, grazing his horse, and collecting birds' eggs. He was happy that his mother had returned, because it meant he could send his soiled clothes into town for her to have washed rather than hiring his laundry out to someone near his camp.¹⁷⁸

In the aftermath of the Confederate defeat at Pulaski, John's company was again ordered to move. Initially, the Hussars packed and marched to a "newly ploughed field." Here, the freshly turned earth sucked at the men's feet, slowing their steps as they worked to unpack wagons, set up tents, and forage for food before they went to bed. Two days later, they were ordered to move again, this time to Beaulieu, a plantation situated along the Vernon River about twelve miles south of Savannah. In contrast to the discomfort of the ploughed field, John and Henry found their new surroundings so appealing that they chose to sleep "under the pines" rather than in their tent.¹⁷⁹

In the idyllic setting of Beaulieu, some unpleasantness occurred. Within each military company, the men formed separate groups to prepare and eat their meals. Each

¹⁷⁸ Ash, April 20 & 21, 1862.

¹⁷⁹ Ash, April 23 & 24, 1862. Both *Charlotte's Boys* and *Immortal Savannah* state that at the time of the Civil War, Benjamin L. Cole owned Beaulieu plantation. In 2015, emails between Benjamin Affleck and Henry Louis Gates were released in which Affleck appeals to Gates not to reveal that Cole was his ancestor. Affleck was embarrassed to learn that he descended from a slaveholder.

“mess” pooled their rations and cookware. Some men brought servants with them to camp, who may or may not have had experience cooking. If there was no servant in the group, one of the men was chosen to cook. These haphazard messes, formed out of necessity, often disappointed the expectations and appetites of the hungry soldiers. Amidst the frequent relocations of moves, John’s mess struggled. He wrote with annoyance about the inconvenience of poorly prepared meals and the squabbles that followed.

After a series of these mess squabbles, six of the men in John’s group decided to leave and form their own mess. Interestingly, John compared their departure from the “Dixie Mess” to Georgia’s secession from the Union. He cheekily declared, “Unlike the U.S. Government, we the remaining members, instead of endeavoring to coerce the seceders, are glad to be rid of the secessionists, as their leaving considerably renovated the Mess.” Throughout the five years of John’s journals this would be the only time he spoke of secession or the cause of the war that altered the course of his life, and that he spent so much time documenting.

Like so many people as they live their lives no matter what space in history they occupy, John was just swept along with the great tide that rolled across the South as white Southerners reacted to the election of Lincoln after decades of struggle for political power over the issue of slavery. If he gave any thoughts to slavery and his role in the system, he didn’t mention them in his journals. From this brief reference to secession, it does seem as if, like many others, he thought secession a perfectly viable option.

As Georgia seceded from the Union, many people felt hopeful of their futures as part of the newly created Confederacy. John reflected that same optimism as his mess

broke apart. Only the next day, it became evident that his optimism had been falsely founded. He went without dinner because his mess “had no meat to cook and no cook even to fix what we did have so as to make it palatable.” A couple of days later, he pitched in to prepare “something which you could not exactly call supper.” These pampered men, away from home, mothers, wives, and in many cases servants, struggled to feed themselves. John complained to himself, “Verily our mess is in a predicament, but better times may still fall to us.” After the newly formed mess failed to thrive, he surely must have realized allowing the secession of the “Dixie Mess” had been a mistake. Unfortunately, it would take both him and the Confederate government a few more years to realize that their upstart government was also a mistake on a much grander scale.

This weariness in the early days of war would become his refrain until the very end of his journaling. Camp life brought discomfort, boredom, and loneliness. As the war progressed, and he experienced greater hardship, he wistfully expressed his hope for better times with a prayerful repetitiveness. Briefly, his mess did look up, as they adopted a man known for thievery within the company. Bronson may have stolen his fellow soldiers’ belongings, but he could cook.¹⁸⁰

Besides the inconvenience of planning and preparing meals, something else happened that caused John great consternation. A campmate fell ill and needed to be taken to town for treatment and to recover. Palmer volunteered to drive him into town. When he returned from his errand in a buggy drawn by a borrowed horse, he drove up to the camp stables and left the horse without tending to him. John confronted him about not feeding the horse, and he flatly refused to do so.

¹⁸⁰ Ash, May 1 – 5, 1862; *Roll of Officers and Members of the Georgia Hussars*, p. 318. R. Bronson was dishonorably discharged for thievery in July, 1862.

Palmer refusing to do what John saw as his responsibility was too much. He went to Captain Wiltberger to complain. The captain considered the situation and sided with John that Palmer should feed the horse. Lieutenant Davant happened to be in the officer's quarters at the time. Overhearing what had happened between John and Palmer, Davant spoke up. He told the captain that John should feed the horse instead of Palmer. This so rankled John that he retorted to the officer that "no one could make" him feed the horse. Confronted with this insolence, Davant told John not to worry about it further. He would have his servant tend to the horse.

Davant's reply added further injury to John. He saw this as a matter of pride and honor. Why should he be compelled to do the chores of another soldier based on what Davant saw as a class discrepancy between the two men? John told Davant that he would have been willing to do a favor for a friend, but "to be made a tool of, I would suffer no such thing." Later writing about the incident, he mused "if he instead of his negro boy had to take charge of him, perhaps he would not be so willing to relieve me of my care about the horse."

John saw the exchange in which another man had been favored over himself by an officer as mean spirited and unjust. In this military environment where he saw himself as the equal to any man in camp, it rankled that he might be viewed as less than another. Like the mess incident, this situation would happen again in different forms. While these were the first occurrences of each source of tension, neither would be the last. Problems with the mess and tensions caused by new restrictions based on social and economic

stratification as demonstrated by military rank would be continuing themes throughout the duration of John's service during the war.¹⁸¹

On May 9th, 1862, a company election was scheduled. The company was being reorganized. The Hussars took the morning off. In the afternoon, they met to cast ballots for the positions of officers. Captain Wiltberger was reelected to lead the company. However, all of the other officers lost their positions to others. In the shakeup, Lieutenant Davant lost his position to Sergeant Zittrouer. This would become known as the "renovation of the Company." A week after his confrontation with Davant, John was deeply satisfied with the results.

In the days that followed the election, non-commissioned officers were appointed by the new company officers. When it came time to fill the position of 4th Corporal, John received a promotion. He saw his new role as "very insignificant" yet he vowed to "endeavor to perform [his] duties to the best of my ability [he] hoped to the complete satisfaction of the men." It's telling that his goal was to satisfy the men of the company rather than the officers. He saw the gap between officers and men as too wide and unfair to the enlisted who served and chafed under military regulations. Those he served with shared his view. Many applied for transfers to other companies.¹⁸²

John's outlook fluctuated depending on the conditions in which he found himself. The newly minted 4th Corporal needed an adjustment period when he was detailed to direct a group of privates to build tent floors for the hospital tents. He quickly grew

¹⁸¹ Ash, April 26, 1862. John referred to Palmer as "Port Royal Palmer." *Roll of Officers and Members of the Georgia Hussars* lists him as B.F. Palmer.

¹⁸² Ash, May 11 & 12, 1862.

frustrated with the negative attitudes of those he was entrusted to supervise. Finding even a noncommissioned officer's world not quite what he expected, he would rather have done "the whole work" himself "than have the trouble of collecting and making do their duty a grumbling squad of men." These men who had enlisted in the excitement of the previous year thinking they would be gallant soldiers now found themselves doing the manual labor of constructing tent floors while being confined to camp. Grumbling gave them a release. "It seems a delight for men to find fault and to be dissatisfied." In his new role Corporal Ash found himself stuck between the men and the officers.¹⁸³

Lieutenant Davant, after losing his position in the election, came out all right in the end. When battalion elections were held, he obtained the position of Major. Now, he outranked Captain Wiltberger. In the same election, Captain Bird of the Effingham Hussars was elected Lieutenant Colonel. John, likewise, received a small bump upwards by the end of May. Due to the discharge of a Sergeant, John was promoted to 3rd Corporal.¹⁸⁴

May 9th, 1862 held significance in John's life for reasons that were close to home, but it held greater significance elsewhere. A few miles up the coast from Savannah on Hilton Head Island, Major General David Hunter of the United States Army sat in his office. A staunch abolitionist, he prepared to make history. When he issued General Order Number 11, he caused quite a stir with his decisive action. As head of the military Department of the South, Hunter commanded Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. In

¹⁸³ Ash, May 14, 1862.

¹⁸⁴ Ash, May 25, 1862.

his view, “Slavery and martial law in a free country are altogether incompatible.”

Following up on his decision to free all slaves present on Cockspur Island after Olmstead had surrendered Fort Pulaski to his officers, he now extended that action further. “The persons in these three states Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina, heretofore held as slaves, are therefore declared forever free.”¹⁸⁵

It took some time for General Hunter’s radical declaration of emancipation to circulate in Savannah. When news of the order reached town, the newspapers refused to even print it because the editor considered it to be a false rumor. Editors at New York newspapers held less reservation. While some may have doubted its authenticity, they all reported on it. The New York *Journal of Commerce* said, “As we do not believe General Hunter is yet insane, we doubt the genuineness of the document.” The *World*, also of New York, readily accepted the order as genuine. They based this on what they had heard earlier that General Hunter had been for some time “issuing papers to negroes . . . guaranteeing freedom and their right to go North, East, South, and West.”¹⁸⁶

Both papers agreed that if the general order were authentic that Lincoln would not allow it to stand. They were right. Ten days after the abolitionist general issued his order, and before the president had confirmation that the order was genuine, Lincoln firmly disavowed it. “General Hunter nor any other commander or person, has been authorized by the Government of the United States to make proclamations declaring the slaves of any State free.” He sought to assuage the public confusion regarding the intentions of the

¹⁸⁵ Abraham Lincoln. *General order no. 11. Declaring order of General Hunter Emancipating Slaves void, etc.* Washington, D. C, 1862. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000579/>. (Accessed January 18, 2017.)

¹⁸⁶ *Daily Morning News*. May 29, 1862.

White House concerning slavery. He reminded the slaveholding states of his offer to compensate states and slaveholders who adopted gradual abolition of slavery, promising them that “the change it contemplates would come gently as the dews of heaven, not rending or wrecking anything.”¹⁸⁷

With mockery and perhaps a bit of self-preservation, the Savannah newspaper reprinted Lincoln’s words. “As a part of the record of the times, and for the amusement of our readers, we give this morning the very remarkable proclamation of Old Abe, reciting Hunter’s order, and repudiating the act of his “’Nigger Ginerall’ at Port Royal.” Though the editors claimed that they hadn’t printed news of the order earlier because they didn’t think it was important enough, there was more to it than that. The editor’s refusal to print the original order hinged on fear that news of it might spread among the enslaved people in the city and surrounding areas.¹⁸⁸

The United States army had only two months earlier displayed its might and power when they brought the bulwark Fort Pulaski to its knees. Now, the enemy held a firm position in Savannah’s backyard. Enslaved people living in the city knew that if they could safely navigate across creeks and rivers and through marshes and reach Cockspur Island, they would be free from slavery. Although the island was only a few miles away, those making the journey knew it would be fraught with danger. They would have to be on the lookout for the many Confederate pickets strung along the outskirts of Savannah. These pickets defended the city from would be Northern invaders, but also formed a wall to keep slaves inside. In delaying printing news of General Hunter’s order extending the

¹⁸⁷ See note 178.

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Morning News*, June 2, 1862.

area of safety and freedom throughout Georgia and two of its bordering states, the *Daily Morning News* used its editorial power to help fight the war that the soldiers waged.

Words and the control of information are powerful weapons in the hands of those who hold the reins of power in a society.

As for David Hunter, he didn't allow Lincoln's repudiation of his actions to dissuade him from further acts supporting the abolition of slavery. He believed that Lincoln "rejoiced in my actions," as the president "never sent me his proclamation or the first word of disapprobation." Later in June when responding to inquiries from the War Department about the existence of a regiment made up of African Americans "fugitive slaves" in South Carolina, Hunter responded impertinently. "No regiment of 'fugitive slaves' has been or is being organized in this department." The general went on to say, "There is, however, a fine regiment of loyal persons whose late masters are 'fugitive rebels' – men who everywhere fly before the appearance of the national flag, leaving their loyal and unhappy servants behind them."¹⁸⁹

While John didn't often record his opinion of events such as these, he did read the newspaper regularly, so he was aware of the shifting world in which he existed whether he recorded his thoughts or not. The radical decisions of General Hunter serve to illustrate the culture and political climate that made up the evolving environment in which John, his family and friends, and fellow soldiers lived.

¹⁸⁹ Report of the Military Services of Gen. David Hunter, U.S.A., during The War of the Rebellion, Made to the U.S. War Department, 1873. Had Lincoln felt the need to admonish Hunter privately, he surely would have. He'd already done so six months earlier in December, 1861 after Hunter had written expressing displeasure over his current military assignment.

Summer of Discontent

As spring faded and summer set in, the monotony multiplied as quickly as the sand gnats and the mosquitoes. John became discontent. He grumbled in the pages of his journal of nightly battles with the insects and the steaming night air. Long, hot days were marked by thunderstorms that swept the islands and drenched the tents and the men living in them. Some days were more tolerable. When off duty, John entertained himself by picking plums and blackberries, and taking evening swims in the cool river. In late May, there were rumors that the entire battalion would be moved to Charleston, but nothing came of it.¹⁹⁰

One June afternoon before the heat became unbearable, Horace Heidt brought Fannie (his sister) and Estella out to Camp Vernon for a visit. The four young people walked toward Ben Cole's place near the river to stroll in a more scenic location than the dusty campsite. Lizzie, John's cousin, had sent him a freshly baked cake, and Horace brought a bottle of wine. Together, the two of them had the refreshments for an afternoon tea. When Estella refused to stay for dinner so that she could return to Savannah in time to attend church with Johnnie Feuger that evening, John was understandably upset and jealous. His time with her was cut short, so that she could spend time with another young man.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Ash, May 25 & 26, 1862.

¹⁹¹ Ash, June 10, 1862.

Having stewed all night, early the next morning, John finagled a permit to go to Savannah where he arrived just before lunch. Motivated by jealousy and the uncertainty of Estella's feelings for the other Johnnie, he intended to clear the air with Estella. As he rode uptown, he spotted Estella and Lizzie shopping at the stores. That evening, John accompanied Estella, Lizzie, and a couple of the girls' friends as they walked out to the old cemetery. There, among the gravestones, John found an opportunity to speak with Estella alone. When he asked her about Johnnie, she gave him "sweet assurances." He found himself comforted by her commitment to him as he rode back into camp that night.¹⁹²

With Federal troops occupying Fort Pulaski and the United States Navy patrolling nearby waters, Savannah was effectively landlocked. The once thriving port had been the city's link to the outside world. Commerce slowed to a crawl. Enter the blockade runners. Across the pond in Liverpool and closer to home in New York and Charleston, firms built ships intended specifically for importing goods to the southern states and exporting their cotton. In Nassau, where admiration and support for the Confederacy ran exceptionally high, the firms created a home base. Warehouses overflowed with cotton, and Nassau men felt comfortable walking the streets and insulting the "yankee" naval officers with "hurrahs for Jeff Davis" as bands played *Dixie*.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Ash, June 11, 1862.

¹⁹³ *Official records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion; Series I – Volume 1: The Operation of the Cruisers* (January 19, 1861 – January 4, 1863) p. 407.

On the morning of June 25, one of the most prolific steamers to run the blockade landed at Beaulieu with a cargo for Savannah. It took two days for the cavalry to help unload the cargo from the *Kate* into wagons and accompany wagon trains into Savannah for storage. When it was unloaded, it was filled with cotton to return to Nassau. Word of the steamer's success spread. Before it ran aground months later, it had managed to run the blockade forty-four times.¹⁹⁴

News of fighting in Virginia reached Savannah and was the talk of the camp in late June. John wrote, "Our victory in Virginia is confirmed, and the enemy are flying before our triumphant army." Even as he performed the tedious duties of camp life, he consoled himself with news of military engagements elsewhere. On the fourth of July, he was reminded of the nearness of the enemy as the troops at Fort Pulaski fired cannons. Booms of celebration filled the ears of the soldiers and those still living in their homes along the coast. Despite the reminder of the enemy being so close, he wrote to his mother asking her to return to Savannah. He assured her that she would be in no danger.¹⁹⁵

After the brief burst of activity brought about by the arrival of the *Kate*, monotony returned. Restless and bored, the men got up to mischief. "The boys" caught Ben Cole's mule and tied a cat to its tail to watch it kick. As they laughed at the spectacle, the cruelty of the sport probably never entered their heads. Violence and brutality were as commonplace and familiar in the South as were the tightly held values of honor and duty.

¹⁹⁴ Ash, June 25-29, 1862.

¹⁹⁵ Ash, June 29-July 8, 1862.

The humor could grow dark. At midnight, John crept through the camp with Sgt. Bloise, peeking in the tents to check beds to ensure that no one was absent without leave. On their bunks in the heat, the soldiers sprawled in slumber in whatever positions they could find comfort. John amused himself by imagining them as “a battlefield, strewn with dead, after a fight.”¹⁹⁶

Eventually, Captain Wiltberger grew tired of both the complaining and the men’s rough attempts at entertaining themselves. When the company bugler sounded off his bugle inappropriately, Wiltberger arrested him. This swift action did nothing to earn the confidence of the privates. They thought he’d behaved unnecessarily harshly. There was a silver lining as the arrest of the offender earned them a break from drill, since their bugler was out of commission.¹⁹⁷

At the end of July, the Hussars again packed up all their belongings and tents and moved. From Camp Vernon at Beaulieu on Skidaway, they relocated to Camp Rose on Isle of Hope. This put them only slightly nearer town. One of the men had reason to be happy. Sgt. William Wakelee received a ten day furlough. He left camp to marry Isabella Bacon, a cousin of Albert Bacon. Wakelee was one of the first men to request a furlough to be married, but he was far from the last. As the war progressed, the trend continued.¹⁹⁸

Discontent grew in the face of the heat and the dreary monotony of camp life. Determined to get away for a few hours, John requested a short leave to “carry [his] horse to town to be shod.” After repeatedly being denied leave, he made up his mind to keep

¹⁹⁶ Ash, July 18, 1862.

¹⁹⁷ Ash, July 15-18, 1862.

¹⁹⁸ Ash, July 23, 1862.

asking until he gained permission. “I will use my feeble endeavors to make the camp as undesirable to the officers as it is to me,” he thought to himself in indignation. The next day, the officer on duty finally wrote a permit for him. John chalked it up to his obstinacy.

While his horse was at the blacksmith’s shop, he returned home to make himself presentable. Then he went uptown with his sister, Susannah, to have his likeness made. After he retrieved his freshly shod horse, his reprieve was over. When he arrived back at Camp Rose late that evening, he found “the boys holding an indignation meeting.” They wished to be moved closer to Savannah.¹⁹⁹

Meanwhile, thirty miles away in Whitesville, Estella prepared her dresses and things to be packed into a trunk. She would be boarding a train to Greensboro where she would attend the Female College. The school was only a decade old and had been formed by the Presbyterian Synod of Georgia. Isaac Stockton Keith Axson served as the first president of the college. He had since been called to serve at the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah.²⁰⁰

The culture of the school can be illustrated by a sermon that Joseph Ruggles Wilson (father of future president Woodrow Wilson) gave when he visited the Female College in 1858. Standing before the girls who gathered in the chapel to hear his words, he took his text from I Corinthians 14:34. *Let your women keep silence in the church.* Wilson had chosen that verse to illustrate the division of roles among the genders, “the

¹⁹⁹ Ash, August 6 & 7, 1862.

²⁰⁰ Ash, August 8, 1862; Dr. Thaddeus Brockett Rice. *History of Greene County Georgia 1786-1886*, (The J.W. Burke Company: Macon, GA, 1961) p. 214. There is some debate as to whether Louisa May Alcott taught at the Female College.

one ruling at the head, and the other subject to that head.” He believed that education was useful for women so that they would not be “deficient in intelligent zeal for the welfare of their fellow man.”²⁰¹

While Estella went away to spend happy months making new friends and learning new things, John was stuck at camp. Even though his visits with her had been more infrequent than he wished, her absence caused him deep distress. As the days passed with no letter from Estella, he wrote of his despair. He felt deprived of his “only pleasure” of her “sweet endearing letters.”

To make things worse, the heat was now at its summer peak. It was “oppressively warm,” and he found it “impossible to sleep.” At night while he lay on his cot, “blood thirsty mosquitoes” and “ravenous sand flies” attacked him. Compounding his discomfort, his mess was again in a state of dysfunction. Horace’s brother came to camp to collect their cook. Sam, the man who had been cooking for John’s group, found himself at the mercy of a probated estate. He had been given to Horace’s uncle, and now had to go where he was told.

For the next few days, John subsisted on milk purchased from a house near camp. He wrote a note to his mother to be passed into town telling her he “was about to starve.” She quickly responded by sending him a box packed with food that same day. Thankfully, he thought, “There is nothing like having a Mother near at hand, when you begin to be in need.”²⁰²

²⁰¹ John M. Mulder. *Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1978) p. 8.

²⁰² Ash, August 11-15 & 23, 1862.

Honor and duty met with John's obstinate nature on a morning when, after finishing guard duty, he requested leave to go for a ride away from camp. Lt. James A. Zittrouer refused his request as two other soldiers had asked before John had. This seems reasonable given the restrictions of military regulations. But he felt that Lt. Zittrouer had behaved "ungentlemanly and unjustly." John chafed under the stratification of military ranking when he felt that he suffered disrespect at the hands of officers. Walking away sulking, he decided that he would do what he wanted to do anyway, regardless of the consequences. So, he saddled up his horse and slipped past the guards. Glancing behind, he saw Lt. Zittrouer and knew that the lieutenant had seen him sneaking away.

On his ride down to White Bluff, he stopped and recorded the events of the morning in his pocket journal, wondering whether Zittrouer would report him to the captain. When he returned to camp just before lunch, he asked around about what had been said in his absence. The men told him that the lieutenant had threatened to have John reduced to private for his behavior. Thoroughly chastened and regretful of having acted impulsively, John prayed that God would "give him the moral strength and courage to enable [him] to always act in a praiseworthy manner!"²⁰³

Despite breaking the rules, John seemed not to have lost the confidence of either the officers or the men. Late in August, Charles Linzee Amory died while in camp. He had been sick with diarrhea for about two weeks and had no family nearby. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Amory left his prominent Boston family and journeyed south to join the Confederacy. The son of a wealthy northern family chose to leave his life of

²⁰³ Ash, August 19, 1862.

comfort to take up the fight with those rebelling against his country. There are many stories of families being divided between North and South, but Amory doesn't appear to have had any relatives in the south. He seems to have been motivated by ideology. John was chosen to sit on a committee to draft a resolution honoring Amory for his service.

WHEREAS, Almighty God in His wise providence has seen fit to remove from our midst our late fellow soldier, Charles L. Amory, be it Resolved, That in his death the service loses a brave and faithful soldier, and we a pleasant companion, who, by his manly bearing and moral virtues, had endeared himself to us all, notwithstanding the shortness of his sojourn with us.

Resolved, That in resisting the strength of early attachments and the persuasion of his friends, eschewing the policy and fanaticism of his native section, and casting his lot earnestly and vigorously with the South, he deserves more than a common tribute to his memory.

Resolved, that we deeply sympathize with his bereaved family, and do assure them that although he was a stranger amongst us, he did not want for friends, who stood by him until the last service was performed then laid him to rest in our own sunny South – the home of his adoption.²⁰⁴

Early the next morning, Amory's body was escorted to the Presbyterian Church at White Bluff and given a military funeral. The resolutions that the committee had drafted were published in the Savannah newspapers and mailed to Amory's parents in Boston. Maybe the bereaved parents found consolation in the knowledge that their son had been cared for during his illness and was mourned by his comrades.²⁰⁵

In early September, John obtained a furlough, and he planned to go "up the Country" to visit Estella's family at Whitesville and his own family in Halcyondale. He spent several days on the farm at Uncle Hezzy's place (Hezekiah Evans) and spent time with his cousins. On the way back to Savannah, he stopped in at Estella's mother's house

²⁰⁴ Ash, August 28, 1862.

²⁰⁵ Ash, August 29, 1862.

to give her some apples he'd picked from his uncle's farm. But he was a lovesick puppy. Even though he was away from camp for the first time in quite a while, he missed Estella dreadfully. "It appears that I can scarcely content myself in one place any length of time. I feel like I am wandering about in search of a mate whom my hearts yearns after."²⁰⁶

Back in camp after his furlough, he awoke on the morning of September 18 just having dreamed of Estella. In the dream, the young couple had been reunited. The sweetness of the image of her buoyed him through the day. This was a day of Thanksgiving as proclaimed by President Jefferson Davis. Most of the men vacated their camps and went to town to attend services at the church of their choice. John, of course, went to the Baptist Church and spent his spare time with his family.

Davis intended the day to commemorate the steady victories of Confederate forces against the Union army. Savannah had not yet heard the news of the Battle of Antietam that had taken place only the day before. The armies of McClellan and Lee met on the bloodiest battlefield in the history of the war. Each side suffered massive casualties with the total loss of life being more than twenty thousand soldiers. It was a victory for the North, and would have been much bloodier and more decisive if McClellan had pursued the retreating Lee out of Maryland. Still, it was significant enough to sway the direction the war had taken up to that point. The victory emboldened President Lincoln to announce his intention to issue the Emancipation Proclamation to free slaves in any state that did not cease its rebellion against the Union.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Ash, September 10, 1862.

²⁰⁷ Ash, September 18, 1862.

Conditions were beginning to worsen in Savannah and for the nearby troops. The Confederate and state governments found themselves failing at the unenviable task of supplying the needs of its newly formed military. The horses of the Georgia Hussars had not seen their allotment of corn for several days. Finally, the cavalrymen took matters into their own hands. Several of them went to a nearby farm and plucked corn from the field to feed their starving horses. At first John did not join them. But when he found that no provisions were expected to arrive, he took pity on his horse. He and Henry went over to the corn field to pick ears of corn for their horses. John reasoned to himself that the “government can not expect its soldiers to respect private property when it will not feed them nor their horses.” This incident foreshadowed what would become a major problem for the Confederacy as soldiers increasingly foraged from civilians when the government failed to provide supplies.²⁰⁸

As the weather cooled, John found solace in writing and receiving letters from Estella who was still at school in Greensboro. He even wrote a letter for the mess cook, Robert, who fancied a girl in Macon. Robert, who was owned by Joseph Weatherly of Athens, also missed loved ones while he was forced to accompany his young master to war. The distance between Athens and Savannah was significant. Since Weatherly had travelled the distance to join the Hussars, he likely had taken Robert with him on previous travels.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Ash, September 21 & 22, 1862.

²⁰⁹ Ash, September 29 & October 3, 1862.

In anticipation of winter, everyone in the company signed a petition asking Captain Wiltberger to speak on their behalf to General Mercer. The men wished to move closer to town and access to solid shelters. John was miserable. He felt like the present could only be made bearable by looking toward the future when there would be no more war, and he would be free to spend his life with Estella. While he surely endured hardships of exposure to the water, boredom, and loneliness, he still had yet to experience battles.²¹⁰

Things weren't all bad. John was promoted twice in October, to First Corporal and then to Fifth Sergeant. He loved drilling the men in their maneuvers. It was a bright spot for him. In other good news, Lizzie, his cousin, was getting married. They asked John to serve as part of the wedding party. So he had a social event to look forward to. On another occasion, the Hussars were asked to serve as General Mercer's bodyguard as he reviewed troops in Savannah. John took great pleasure in the way the men of his company performed their duties under his leadership.²¹¹

Even though General Mercer entrusted the Hussars to escort him in Savannah, they had an outlaw in their midst - literally, Private Stephen Outlaw. He'd requested a furlough for marriage. On October 10, Bishop Augustin Verot united Outlaw and Anne Martin in marriage. When he finally returned late from furlough, he was immediately arrested for his absence without leave. Outlaw was also suspected for another crime: stealing one of Captain Wiltberger's horses and selling it. As the son of a blacksmith with only \$200 in property, it's a mystery how he ended up in a company of cavalrymen to

²¹⁰ Ash, October 12 & 13, 1862.

²¹¹ Ash, October 14, 27, & 28, 1862.

begin with. Possibly, he initially stole a horse to meet the requirements to join. At the tender age of sixteen, he had already served time in the penitentiary for stealing a mule. In the evening, Outlaw broke out of the guard house, stole a horse, and rode bare back fleeing his arrest.

Sgt. James Farr was sent to apprehend the escapee and found him at the railroad depot in Savannah, already onboard a train about to leave town. Outlaw, finding himself once again behind bars, implicated another soldier in the theft of the horse as an accomplice. Coincidentally, the very next day, a man arrived from “up the country” to report that Outlaw had stolen a horse from his neighbor and sold it. John pitied his Anne Martin for having married such a rogue. The soldier that had been arrested on the word of Outlaw was released, given the lack of trustworthiness in Outlaw’s word.

When brought back to camp from Savannah, Outlaw again escaped. His guards fired after him as he ran, but he managed to get away without injury. A couple of days later, he was found several stops up the Central of Georgia Railroad and returned to Savannah. This time, the army left him lodged in the jail in Savannah to face trial for his crime. John was dismayed when couriers arrived in camp to inform him that Outlaw had requested that he testify on his behalf. “I know nothing of the affair and cannot see what I can witness for the prisoner.” Outlaw was the same age as John and must have been likeable enough to be newly arrived in Savannah, be trusted, make friends, and find a bride. They must have been on friendly terms. But John disavowed Outlaw. “If I ever was a particular friend of his, I would avoid him as so much poison, on account of his late

daring deeds.” Thanks to the overwhelming evidence against Outlaw, John managed to save face and not testify in the trial.²¹²

Happier times interrupted camp life. November 5th was Lizzie’s wedding day. John received twenty-four hours leave to serve as a groomsman at his cousin’s wedding to Thomas Owens. Reverend Landrum married the couple in the parlor of Lizzie’s parents’ (Charles and Jane Ash) home. After the cake had been cut and served, the wine poured and imbibed, and many happy rounds of congratulations, John left the wedding with his sister-in-law, Sarah. As he walked her home and sat with her before telling her good night, she gave him quite a talk. “How I do love you!” John thought to himself as he listened intently to the words of wisdom which Sarah imparted to him. She spoke plainly to him about the importance of avoiding sexual temptation before marriage and the neglect that some men gave to their wedding vows. Sarah emphasized the importance of faithfulness to one’s spouse. Apparently, no one had ever before spoken to him in quite this manner. John filled a couple of pages in his journal recounting their conversation and concluded, “never had a person [spoken] with me more kindly, earnestly, freely, and the very spirit of love and deep interest in my welfare.”²¹³

After his short interlude in Savannah, John returned to camp. Mornings were brisk now as white frost covered the ground. In preparation for deepening cold, John and Henry planned to build a log hut for their winter shelter. John’s thoughts turned to Christmas, and he argued successfully for leave to go into town so that he could shop for Estella’s Christmas gift. Unfortunately, his mare was lame, and he couldn’t ride her. John

²¹² *Daily Morning News*, October 22, 1862; Ash, October 22-November 1, 1862.

²¹³ Ash, November 5, 1862.

didn't let that stop him. He determined to walk the six and a half miles to town and back.

While he was in Savannah, he heard that Outlaw had managed to escape from jail.²¹⁴

His nineteenth birthday passed almost without notice, but a more significant anniversary captured his attention. John remarked on the one year mark of enlistment in this way.

Yesterday was the anniversary of being mustered into the Confederate service. We would have been mustered out on yesterday had not the War assumed the terrible and lasting phase that now alas! characterizes it, and which rendered the passage of the Conscript Act so necessary. Instead of being free today, however, the prospect for the future looks very gloomy, and we know not how long we have yet to be compelled to be absent from our dear homes, and live on the tents field ready to meet our fates in mortal combat.²¹⁵

Despite his gloominess, John still held an air of optimism when he thought of future. He considered what university he might attend should he have opportunity to do so. His new bunkmate, Percy Guerard shared information with him about the University of Virginia.²¹⁶

While John continuously resented the officer's restriction of his personal freedom, his close friend Henry was even more sensitive and highly reactive to what he perceived as insults. John described him as "very generous and noble hearted, but it is one of Henry's faults that sometimes he is very stubborn when he imagines himself aggrieved or imposed upon." On an afternoon when the men marched to the parade ground, Henry led a column. Just behind him, walked John Weatherly. Weatherly had taken a few too many nips at the bottle and marched tipsily, frequently stepping on Henry's heels. Henry didn't

²¹⁴ Ash, November 9, 12, & 15, 1862.

²¹⁵ Ash, November 24, 1862.

²¹⁶ Ash, December 5, 1862 & July 19, 1863.

realize that Weatherly made the mistakes due to intoxication. When his annoyance tipped the scales, he whirled about and swiftly kicked Weatherly. The officer, noticing a disruption in the ranks, halted the march. Weatherly was sent back to quarters to sleep it off.

At breakfast the next morning after Weatherly had sobered up, he asked Henry if he had been the one who'd kicked him the day before. When Henry confirmed that he had, Weatherly pointedly told Henry that the assault was a "very ungentlemanly trick." Henry responded furiously, whipping off his hat and coat and taking the fight to Weatherly. Two of the men pulled the quarreling parties apart, and John reasoned with Henry to put aside his differences because the officers were watching the spectacle unfold at their mess table.

Henry calmed himself, but later he wrote a note demanding that Weatherly take back his insult. John carried the note to Weatherly. While Henry waited for a reply to his demand, he and John took a wagon to pick up a bedstead for the two of them to share. Returning to camp and finding no reply, Henry wrote another note and challenged Weatherly to a duel to settle the matter. John wanted no part of this. He flatly refused to carry the challenge for his friend.

Weatherly refused to appear at the appointed time. Most of the men in the company took Henry's side on the matter, agreeing that Weatherly was a "mean, despicable character." When the mess met for dinner, Weatherly berated Henry. Henry replied that Weatherly was now beneath his notice. "Here, with a mutual understanding, that each disliked the other, the affair rested." But the incident did create a need for

Henry and John to find another mess to prepare their meals. Robert, who belonged to Weatherly, would no longer be allowed to cook for the two of them.²¹⁷

The weather sharpened and the air became so bitterly cold that in the morning at breakfast, spilled coffee froze into puddles of brown ice on the wooden table. To the joy and relief of all the men, the Hussars finally received orders to move closer to Savannah. They would strike camp and set up tents on the southwest side of the city, just east of Laurel Grove cemetery. As the Hussars were being moved closer, infantry units were being sent out of the state into South Carolina and North Carolina.

John spent his first few days back in town settling in, spending more time at home, and attending church services. He found time to shop for a ring to give Estella for Christmas and to make it official that they would marry the next year. Being so near the cemetery, one evening he took a walk to visit the gravesite of Colonel Francis Bartow who had been an agitator for secession and also one of the first to give his life in battle for the cause he believed in so fiercely.²¹⁸

Captain Wiltberger was even grumpier than usual. He likely found comfort in being back in town closer to his Pulaski House, but the men also nagged him for leave much more frequently than they had before. Who could blame them with warm homes, mothers near at hand, and young ladies to be flirted with? But the captain reacted harshly when Eben and John asked one time too many or perhaps at the wrong time for permission to go to church. He cursed at them and told them they could not go. This hurt John's feelings, and he spent the day lying on his bunk reading books. That evening, he

²¹⁷ Ash, December 1 & 2, 1862.

²¹⁸ Ash, December 8-20, 1862.

didn't even bother asking permission. In his frustration, He just left camp after dinner and went home for a visit with his family.

With the change of seasons and the move back to the city, the year ended. The grumbles of discontent disappeared from the pages of John's journals. Instead, he recounted much more of his daily activities with a better attitude. He had a fresh outlook at the dawning of a new year and the promises of what it might bring.²¹⁹

Burst of Activity

On the first morning of the new year, John arrived in camp from a cold night on guard duty. Estella had come home from school for the holidays and just that morning had taken the train from Whitesville to Savannah. Luckily, it was John's rotation for twelve hours of leave. First, he assembled with the company for review and then hours of drilling. At two o'clock that afternoon when his camp duties were finished, he approached Captain Wiltberger, who was himself preparing to go into town. Rough as usual, the captain told him he couldn't leave camp. John decided to go on his "own book." Lt. Erastus Hill spotted him leaving camp and hurried to tell him that the Colonel had given him permission to go.

Needing to clean off the dust after drilling for most of the day, he stopped off at home for a change of clothes. Then he hurried to Mrs. Hungazer's house where Estella and Florida were staying, and he escorted the girls to Jane's house where Lizzie was. He only stayed a short while before he left the party to return to camp for dress parade. Without asking permission to leave camp again, he made up his mind to go back home

²¹⁹ Ash, December 21, 1862.

for dinner, but to be back in time for tattoo. Once he'd shown his face at all required gatherings of the day, he went back to town. Lizzie was throwing a small eggnog party.

After such a long absence from Estella, he was willing to break the rules to be with her. Her allure and the nearness of home and loved ones after such a lengthy absence made the risk of getting caught worthwhile. As the group sipped eggnog in the glow of one another's presence, the fire bell peeled in the night. Having "run the blockade," he jumped up and ran through the sandy streets as fast as his legs could carry him in case he should be noticed missing from camp. Once the fire was put out, he again went to Jane's house where everyone was still gathered. About midnight, he walked Estella and Florida back to Mrs. Hungazer's house and returned to camp. That night and many nights after, he earnestly prayed that the war would be over before the year ended.²²⁰

Now that John had successfully vacated camp without being caught, he began to take even more liberties than he had before. A few days later when he was assigned duty to oversee the pickets in the area, he made a cursory stop at each post before going home to spend the day where he wouldn't be spotted out and about. Sarah had taken Estella to exchange the pearl ring John had given her for an emerald and diamond one. They brought it by for him to see on Estella's hand, and he approved of their selection.

Over the next week with more time to spend together, the young lovers carved out time alone from the others to discuss their plans for the future. They wanted to be married before the end of the year. John also spent time with his mother and broke the news of his intentions toward Estella by reading aloud some of the letters they'd exchanged over the

²²⁰ Ash, January 1, 1863.

months. In the meantime, Estella planned to continue her studies at the Female College. At the end of the first week in January, John helped her take her trunks to the depot to go back to Whitesville to spend time with her family before her holiday ended.²²¹

It was a little more than two years into the war that had begun after the election of Lincoln. At the first of the year, the President's proposed Emancipation Proclamation had gone into effect, freeing all the slaves within the rebel states. On the Northern side, the official motivation for the war up to that point had been only to hold the union together. After the proclamation, ending slavery was a primary goal of the Civil War. However, it could only be enforced in areas that the Union army controlled.

In Savannah, slaveholders still engaged in the buying and selling of their human property. Southerners demonstrated their confidence that the institution would endure. Nelly, one of the women that John had inherited at his father's death, had caught the eye of George Moore. When he asked John to call on him to discuss the possibility of him purchasing her, John declined to sell Nelly. Rather than sell, he wanted to buy more slaves.²²²

At the end of January, Estella came back to town for a few days before she left for school. She brought a friend with her to call at George Moore's house. Once more, John left camp without permission to spend the evening with his intended. Late in the evening as they sat around the crackling fire in the parlor, the cries of "Fire!" being shouted in the streets reached their ears. Again, John raced pell-mell on the road back to camp to avoid detection. Luckily, he wasn't caught. He later returned to walk Estella back to Mrs.

²²¹ Ash, January 3, 4, 7 & 18, 1862.

²²² Ash, January 17, 1862.

Hungazer's.²²³ As the young couple prepared to be parted once more, they went uptown to have their likenesses made and exchanged them. When Estella left for Whitesville, she chose one of the latest departing trains. John engaged a carriage to take her to the depot. There, he reluctantly parted with her. "To think how long it will be before we meet again made me feel melancholy for a time, but hope cheers me up."²²⁴

In an effort to reorganize the companies that had been created at the outset of the war, the Hussars were consolidated into a regiment named the 5th Georgia Cavalry commanded by Colonel Robert Houstoun Anderson. Only eight years older than John, he'd left Savannah to finish his education at the United States Military Academy at West Point. As an officer in the U.S. Army, he had made the decision to resign his commission in March of 1861 to join the Confederate war effort. The officers of the newly formed 5th Georgia did not approve of Anderson to lead the regiment. They signed a petition asking that an election be held for the position of colonel and forwarded it to James Setton, Confederate Secretary of War.²²⁵

It didn't take long for Anderson's mettle to be put to the test. The U.S. Navy, having been reinforced by the ironclad, U.S.S. Montauk, planned an attack on Fort McAllister at Genesis Point. Colonel Anderson, in his new duties, oversaw the fortifications in the area. On January 27, the navy fired on the fort for five hours, but it failed to yield. Again, on February 1, the Montauk shelled the fort. As John ate dinner in

²²³ Ash, January 30, 1862.

²²⁴ Ash, February 3, 1863.

²²⁵ Ash, January 23, 1863.

his home on Taylor Street, the cannon “roared like distant thunder” and the “windows in the houses of the city shake at every discharge of the guns.”²²⁶

While some men adjusted well to the strictures of war and camp life despite the discomforts they caused, others did not. Robert “Bob” Brantley suffered bouts of depression and mania. He would wake up in the middle of the night, leave his tent, and rouse those near him with his shouts that he wanted to kill himself. The first time it happened, the doctor gave him a sedative. Another time, when he accompanied his suicidal threats by firing his pistol, he “was not trifled with.” Instead he was arrested and confined for the night. John referred to the man’s mental illness as “foolish fits.” John’s attitude was typical. Mental illness was not well understood or tolerated. Brantley’s wasn’t an isolated case. Another soldier who was convalescing from an illness in the hospital “became insane”, jumped out of a window some 15 or 20 feet from the ground, found an axe, and “chopped himself in the head a dozen or more times.” He died a couple of days later.²²⁷

Outlaw, the young man who caused so much mischief in 1862, had finally been found again. When he arrived on the train, he was put in jail to await his execution by firing squad. John had fallen ill and was on the sick list when names were drawn to see who would be among the twelve men to form the firing squad at Outlaw’s execution. The very next day, an order from General P.G.T. Beauregard arrived. Father Jeremiah O’Neil used his connection to the general, requesting that Outlaw be given leniency. His

²²⁶ Ash, January 29 & February 7, 1862.

²²⁷ Ash, January 31, 1863 & September 1-3, 1863.

execution was to be delayed by fourteen days, but John expected that Confederate president Jefferson Davis would revoke the sentence.²²⁸

It wasn't just Outlaw who was in trouble with the authorities. John also found himself in a situation to untangle the particulars of a domestic dispute. "The gentle moon rose . . . and shone upon [John] in all her beauty and grandeur," the night before he awoke to resolve a situation that showcased his growing maturity as well as the unfairness that the enslaved tolerated in their day to day lives. Phillis, sent by John's mother, arrived in camp to ask John to come home to help with some difficulty. Some time back, Charles had two silver spoons stolen from his house. In his determination to recover them, he'd offered a reward of \$5 for their return. A young boy who belonged to a neighbor came to Charles to tell him that Mary had stolen the spoons. In his eagerness, Charles acted on his own authority. He immediately went to the house where Mary had been hired to work, took her into his custody, and searched her things. No spoons were found. He did find four pounds of flour.

Not being satisfied, Charles determined to take Mary to jail to be confined. John's mother persuaded him to keep her at his house overnight. As soon as morning came Sarah sent Phillis to get John to stop Mary from being jailed. Phillis had a special interest in the outcome. Mary was her daughter. John was disheartened when he heard about the flour that she'd stolen, thinking it a reflection on him, but he was determined to get to the bottom of the story about the spoons. He didn't stop to consider that Mary may have stolen the flour for the same reason that he had stolen the ears of corn from

²²⁸ Ash, February 5-8, 1863.

Mrs. Heugany's field. Supplies were scarce in blockaded Savannah, and everyone was affected.

As he went home, he took time to compose himself. "Anger" he thought to himself, "is my besetting sin." Stopping to get his mother to go with him to Charles' house, when he arrived at his brother's doorstep, he immediately inquired why he thought he had the authority to take control of someone that John owned. Charles' temper flared, but John told him to cool down so that they could calmly discuss the matter. As Charles explained everything that had been said and done, John suggested that they ask the neighbor who owned the boy who'd requested the reward to search his things. Then John went home with his mother. Shortly afterwards, Mary came running home from Charles' house to tell John that the spoons had been found in the boy's things.

Phillis and Mary were both relieved that everything had worked out positively. For them and for others, situations like these were a delicate balancing act. Here they were caught between two brothers. The last thing they wanted was for the brothers to agree that Mary should remain in jail. Phillis hoped to influence John as their master to protect her daughter. The information she chose to present to John and how she presented it were the only tools she had to control what happened to Mary. John listened, but he was also motivated by his desire to preserve a source of income and take responsibility rather than being overridden by his older brother.²²⁹

²²⁹ Ash, February 7, 1862.

Back at camp, Colonel Anderson's tent was being pitched in anticipation of him joining the Hussars. His leadership became official on Valentine's Day, and he gave a speech to assembled men. He asked the "cooperation of both men and officers to make the 5th Regiment Georgia Cavalry one of the best and most efficient regiments in the Southern Confederacy." Discipline immediately began to tighten under the West Point educated officer. Only the next day, Henry was required to walk post with a log on his shoulder for most of the day just for being absent for two hours.²³⁰

John's first encounter with the new colonel came for a minor but embarrassing infraction. On a morning just after John had dismissed the men from inspection, he felt the need "to attend a call of nature." Not wishing to go to the "rifle pits" that had been dug for the men to use in a rudimentary attempt at sanitation, he went beyond the camp boundaries into the woods. He sought out privacy and distance from the foul odor that pervaded the trenches. As he walked back into camp, he was arrested by the guard. As a noncommissioned officer, he had the right to an investigation and trial before being detained, and he immediately requested to see someone in authority about the matter. Captain Aiken thought he should be punished by walking post while carrying the log. When Colonel Anderson heard what had happened, he called John to his tent and lectured him then let him go about his business. "Military law has come to an undue assumption of perfection," John fumed to himself.²³¹

²³⁰ Ash, February 13-15, 1863.

²³¹ Ash, March 8, 1863.

Much as the men resented the military discipline in camp, it was necessary. Savannah was at war. The continued U.S. Navy attacks on Fort McAllister filled the city with the sounds of battle. Soldiers caught camping at night between the fort and the Yankees described the bombardment of the fort as beautiful. “The shells could be followed in their courses through the heavens for about two miles, and when they could be seen to burst the sight was still more beautiful.” In anticipation of a land attack, John was sent with a group of men to scout the roads and batteries on the outskirts of Savannah. Fort McAlister withstood the attack by the ironclads. The *Rattlesnake*, formerly the *Nashville*, was not so lucky. Loaded with cotton, she attempted to make her way up the Ogeechee River. Spotted by one of the ironclads, they unloaded on her until the boat caught fire and burned, destroying all the cotton onboard.²³²

Despite the increased military activity or maybe because of it, John was still focused on a brighter future. He visited Reverend Landrum one afternoon when he was on leave to tell him that he felt called to join the ministry and to ask the older man’s advice on how to proceed. Landrum was eager to mentor John and loaned him a book on theology. Perhaps in adherence to the call to ministry, John attempted to encourage Outlaw in his despondency while on duty at the guard tent. He even wrote a letter to the prisoner’s wife for him. Outlaw, despite being pardoned by Jefferson Davis and John’s and others attempts to cheer him up, managed to rid himself of the heavy ball and chain and escape again.²³³

²³² Ash, February 27, 28 & March 8, 1863.

²³³ Ash, March 10-20, 1863.

When Outlaw was captured just north of Macon and put in jail, John was sent to retrieve him. Going by train from Savannah to Clinton, John found himself on an adventure. He stopped in Whitesville to see his future mother-in-law and encountered many interesting characters also riding the rails. One was a cursing sixteen-year-old boy who had been discharged from the military and expressed anger about being sent home to his parents. Another man was returning from Savannah where he'd been on court martial. He'd been one of the U.S. officers who apprehended John Brown in Virginia. When John arrived in Clinton, he toured a cotton mill. He was greatly impressed by the intricacy of the machinery, but noted the "pale and colorless faces" of the "broken" people who worked there. Once he'd retrieved his prisoner, who only days before he'd tried to help accept his situation, they boarded a train back to Savannah.²³⁴

Shortly after John arrived back in the city, battle broke out in Charleston. The U.S. Navy had gathered together nine ironclads to attack Fort Sumter. After a day of bombardment in which the navy suffered losses, it abandoned the attack. News of the Confederate victory heartened John and others in Savannah. John was in a celebratory mood despite having to go to court to give his testimony against Outlaw.²³⁵

Though Outlaw managed to avoid the firing squad, the devastating results of what could happen as a result of a court martial carried themselves out before the eyes of John, the entire military presence in Savannah, and hundreds of civilian bystanders only a couple of days later. How twenty-three-year-old Michael Keiner ended up in Savannah is

²³⁴ Ash, March 30-April 2, 1863.

²³⁵ Ash, April 7 & 8, 1863. This is the last time John referred to Outlaw in his journals. Further research shows that Outlaw was released from jail in 1866 after the end of the war, but the remainder of his life remains unknown.

a bit of a mystery. Born in France, he'd only lived in the United States for about a year. How he wound up in the Confederate Army is even more of a mystery. Maybe he needed money, and the army was quick employment. Or, maybe he was pressed into service. Whatever the circumstances, he attempted to desert with a fellow soldier. He was on his way to enemy lines to turn himself into the U.S. forces in hopes of reuniting with his family in New York. The pair had the extreme misfortune of encountering officers on picket. Keiner made the fatal choice of returning fire when fired upon. He soon found himself in Colonel Charles Olmstead's court marital room and was sentenced to death by firing squad. Unlike Outlaw, there was no reprieve coming for Keiner.

On the morning of April 10, John's regiment along with all the others was formed and marched to the South Common, near Laurel Grove Cemetery. There they assembled in a "hollow square" to prevent the curious crowd from encroaching on the place of the coming event. The prisoner was retrieved from the jail and marched in a procession accompanied by the Catholic priest, Reverend Clemons Pendergrast, to the place of his execution. While a solemn dirge played, he marched with a full view of his coffin, which preceded him in the line of procession.

The firing line stood ready as Reverend Pendergrast addressed them. Finally, he turned and knelt with the prisoner with their backs to the squad, praying with him and kissing his cheeks in his final moments. Lieutenant Alfred Bryan approached the prisoner and ordered him to turn to face his executioners. On his knees, Keiner shuffled to face the soldiers. Eyes downcast, he tapped on his chest, wordlessly asking them to aim for his heart. Within seconds, it was over. As the shots rang out and the bullets punctured his body, he collapsed onto his right side and his left arm quivered as he died. The companies

of soldiers were marched past the corpse of the unlucky immigrant while a detachment kept the morbidly curious observers from flocking to the body. Reverend Pendergrast oversaw the coffining of the body and accompanied it to the Catholic Church where it would be interred. When John had finished recording the events of the day in his journal, he concluded, “What I have seen today I do not think I will ever forget.”²³⁶

As the whirlwind of activity that had been Spring drew to a close, John’s time in the city was coming to an end.

Back to the Isles

On an evening when a heavy thunderstorm soaked the canvas tents and made everything damp and miserable, the men of the 5th Georgia Cavalry were informed that orders had been issued for them to move back to the Isle of Hope. That same day, news had reached Savannah of Stonewall Jackson’s amputation and the battles that had taken place in Virginia and Mississippi. The Confederate military was in a state of transition. Even as the regiment formed and marched out of town accompanied by wagons carrying their equipment, they met other regiments marching from the islands into town en route to Mississippi.²³⁷

Life soon took on its old rhythm of berry picking and swimming to pass the hours. John had recently purchased a new mare, and he had developed an obsession with collecting eggs. “I never feel satisfied unless I am roaming about the Island. It seems like

²³⁶ Ash, April 10, 1863.; *Daily Morning News*, April 11, 1863; Russell K. Brown, *Our Connection with Savannah: A History of the First Battallion Georgia Sharpshooters 1862-1865*, (Mercer University Press: Macon, GA, 2004) p.34-35.

²³⁷ Ash, May 5, 1863.

my whole attentions is directed to bird eggs.” Despite his restlessness, he still had to attend to both his military and family responsibilities. It seemed since his confrontation with his older brother Charles had ended satisfactorily, his mother entrusted him more with handling the servants, many of whom were working outside her home. Ellen, who had been given to Susannah in the probate of George’s estate, now belonged to John’s mother. She had been washing at the hospital, but John sent her into town to different employment. In town, she got into some trouble, but John had her released from jail.²³⁸

In June, it was announced that General Beauregard would accompany General Mercer to review the batteries outside of Savannah. When the steamer he was on drew up and anchored right in front of the Hussars’ camp, the soldiers gathered on the banks of the river “to get a glance at the worthy leader of our forces.” To their “mortification and dissatisfaction,” Colonel Anderson sent the adjutant to order the men back into quarters. “It is indeed a shame!” John felt as he went about his day confined to the interior of the camp. Colonel Anderson spent the day reasoning with the general that the 5th Georgia Regiment wasn’t needed either on the Isle of Hope or in Savannah. The restless West Point graduate requested that his regiment either be moved to Virginia or Tennessee where it would be of more use.²³⁹

The men learned that they might be moved in quite a roundabout way. Sgt. Farr received a furlough for ten days, and on the back of it Colonel Anderson had written that when it expired, Farr should meet the 5th Georgia in “Augusta or wherever else it might

²³⁸ Ash, May 24 & 25, June 1, September 15, 1863.

²³⁹ Ash, June 10 & 25, 1863; George A. Rogers and R. Frank Saunders. *Swamp Water and Wiregrass: Historical Sketches of Coastal Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984) p 79.

be.” Now they were on pins and needles as rumors circulated of where they would be sent to fight. John’s hopes of being given a summer furlough sank, but he chose to trust in the providence of God. Still, so anxious was he about his furlough, seeing Estella, and planning their wedding that he consistently suffered nightmares that something would happen to upend all their plans.

When orders were read that no one would be allowed to leave camp for any reason, the Hussars became outraged and caused a great uproar in camp. As the men waited on the Isle of Hope for their marching orders, they dreaded the idea they would be forced to march through Savannah “in sight of their homes” without being permitted to say goodbye to their families. Giving in to the men, Captain Wiltberger graciously arranged for them to go to town in groups of fifteen for five hours visits. Only after all the men visited Savannah and the equipment had been packed and sent to town, was the order to move to Augusta countermanded. Much to the Hussars’ relief, they would be staying at Isle of Hope for the time being. Colonel Anderson must have been as deeply disappointed as his men were relieved. Perhaps to soothe their ruffled feelings, when court martialing some of the prisoners of the regiment, he ordered them relieved of their balls and chains and released. This gave John “delight” that they no longer suffered “degradation.”²⁴⁰

Anderson and the soldiers were not the only ones whose hopes for or fears of moving were stirred with news of changes. The enslaved men who had accompanied their masters to camp felt the same emotions, not to mention being inconvenienced by the packing and unpacking of equipment. At midnight when Company D of the 5th Georgia

²⁴⁰ Ash, June 16-19 & 26, 1863.

was ordered to move to McIntosh County, the cooks were roused from their beds to prepare. They gave “vent to a multitude of expressions, such as enquiring about rations, hallooing and making a fuss.” Often overlooked by historians, they made the lives of the soldiers more tolerable as they prepared meals for the men. Just as the soldiers’ lives were subject to the commands of their officers, the cooks’ lives were subject to the moods and whims of those they served. With limited provisions and in rustic settings, they found it difficult to keep them satisfied all the time. John, at one point, dissatisfied by the quality and organization of the mess, took it out on the cook. He “took a good strap” and “decently whipped” two of the cooks. The enslaved men didn’t even belong to him, but by virtue of his whiteness, he felt justified beating the men who were held by Percy Guerard and Thomas Harden. Violence or corporal punishment was a tool which had long been used by slaveholders to ensure the obedience and submission of those they enslaved.²⁴¹

In the summer of 1863, a little more than a year after Fort Pulaski had been retaken by the United States, people were still making their way across the marshes to the first stop on the Underground Railroad to freedom. The way was fraught with danger. Those who were laboring at the behest of the Confederate Army on the isles found themselves especially tempted to flee to liberty, even at the risk of losing their lives. The Hussars began taking special precautions to avoid loss due to defection. Pickets

²⁴¹ Ash, June 27 & September 7, 1863; Ash, August 14, 1863. To be fair whipping was also used to punish soldiers. When the men of his company took a strap to Bob Brantley for stealing a watch that belonged to Ned Skinner, John expressed regret that he hadn’t been in camp to join the “whipping line.” Violence was commonplace in the south. As a boy, John himself had complained of growing tired of whippings as a schoolboy.

accompanied those who were sent to cut marsh grass or other such errands.²⁴²

Despite their increased vigilance, seven people made a safe and successful journey to Cockspur Island in July. Perhaps they were led to safety by March Haynes. Haynes, a native of South Carolina, had lived in Savannah since 1858. He enlisted in the United States Army during the war and made many perilous trips from Savannah to Union lines with people seeking freedom. On one trip, he was shot by Confederate pickets, but returned fire and avoided capture.²⁴³

These successful escapes and others like them must have been the topic of many whispered conversations as servants went about their work in Savannah. One might think that only the most mistreated of all servants would be willing to risk their lives for freedom. But even those who were owned by comparatively moderate slaveholders were willing to take their chances for a life free from bondage.

Early one July morning, Charles Olmstead awoke in his house in Savannah to find that his cook had run away with a small group of servants from neighboring homes. Conditions in the Olmstead kitchen can be demonstrated by an excerpt that Olmstead related of his time at Fort Pulaski later in life. “If a kitchen did not meet the requirements,” that could be remedied by laying the cook “over a brass drum and a good paddling administered with a shingle.” This method “broke no bones.” Olmstead unashamedly, “recommend[ed] the method to housekeepers with inefficient or careless servants.” Sadly, the pickets from John’s company found her hiding on Skidaway Island

²⁴² Ash, June 13, 1863.

²⁴³ Ash, July 9, 1863; Emanuel King Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church from its Organization* (The Morning News Print: Savannah, GA, 1888) p. 177,191.

when they went to their point of duty. They brought her back to camp with them to be returned to Olmstead. But they had spotted another runaway, and John was sent to fetch the slavecatcher and his dogs to go after him.²⁴⁴

A man belonging to Eben's older brother met with an unfortunate fate. Whether he was attempting to run away or was simply in the wrong place in the wrong time is not entirely clear. He was in a boat with another man near the little Skidaway Bridge. As they approached a picket post, the pickets fired on the boat. The bullet entered the top of his head and exited his neck. He was believed to have been killed immediately.²⁴⁵

Later in the summer a new batch of slaves was sent to the isle of Hope to build batteries at Montmollin's Point and Grimball's place. As they toiled in the hot sun, digging dirt and heaping it in enormous piles which they shaped into batteries, the proximity of Union lines tempted them. Watching and waiting, learning the routines of those they worked for, and gathering news of the location of picket posts, they planned their escape. In the dark of night, they waded into the river to swim to the other side. Four of them made it across to the other side, but one of them was startled by a porpoise that swam near him and he drowned. The others who had yet to attempt to cross the river felt wary of attempting after they saw their friend die. They returned to Grimball's, but were not forgiven their attempt. Instead, they were arrested and sent to the jail in Savannah.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Ash, July 12, 1863; Hawes, Lilla Mills ed., *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society, Vol.XIV: The Memoirs of Charles H. Olmstead*, (Savannah: The Georgia Historical Society, 1964) p. 83, 118.

²⁴⁵ Ash, July 18, 1863.

²⁴⁶ Ash, August 19 & September 19, 1863.

The man who had created the climate which inspired these hopeful runaways was Major General David Hunter. Still on Hilton Head Island and still organizing escapees into military units, he wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in 1863.

The poor negro is fighting for liberty in its truest sense; and M^r [Thomas] Jefferson has beautifully said, – “in such a war, there is no attribute of the Almighty, which will induce him to fight on the side of the oppressor.”

You say you are fighting for liberty. Yes you are fighting for liberty: liberty to keep four millions of your fellow-beings in ignorance and degradation;—liberty to separate parents and children, husband and wife, brother and sister;—liberty to steal the products of their labor, exacted with many a cruel lash and bitter tear,²⁴⁷

A true abolitionist general, Hunter had no intention of abandoning his efforts to help achieve complete and total emancipation for the millions in bondage in the South. In a slow but steady trickle, men and women arrived to safety in the United States Department of the South.

Those of the darker hue were not the only ones risking their lives to get to the safety of Union lines. “Ten soldiers assigned to one of the batteries guarding the river fled to the enemy in Fort Pulaski.” They had something in common as a group and with the departed Michael Keiner; none of them had been born in the United States. When interviewed by the officers of Fort Pulaski, the immigrants said that they’d left because the “rule of the Confederacy . . . is an evil only to be endured because of the inability of the people to oppose or escape from it.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Major Gen. D. Hunter to Jefferson Davis, 23 Apr. 1863, enclosed in Maj. Gen. D. Hunter to Hon. E. M. Stanton, 25 Apr. 1863, S-1563 1863, Letters Received, series 12, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives.
<http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Hunter2.html>. Retrieved February 1, 2016.

²⁴⁸ James David Griffin. *Savannah, Georgia, During the Civil War*. (Dissertation: University of Georgia, 1963) p. 246.

John's life didn't stop as he witnessed these events, and they had little effect other than just being unusual events that he recorded in his journal each night. For him, the danger the runaways faced as they desperately reached for freedom was purely anecdotal. He was much more focused on more personal matters. His furlough that he'd been so worried would be denied, finally came through. With great relief, he packed up for his much anticipated trip to Whitesville.²⁴⁹

He left camp at six o'clock in the morning, but didn't arrive in the village where Estella lived until ten o'clock that night. First, there was the two hour long horseback ride into town, then he had business to attend to, followed by a two hour train ride to Whitesville. When he knocked on Mrs. Powers' door late that evening, Estella met him at the door. She was home from school to stay now. Mrs. Powers' parlor was packed with young ladies who'd gathered to plan a picnic the next day. They'd hoped to make the journey to Isle of Hope, but due to inclement weather and a lack of reliable transportation from the depot in Savannah out to the island, they had to cancel their plans.²⁵⁰

The next morning a group of John and Estella's friends met them with hampers of food, and they all walked along the railroad tracks about a mile outside of town to the old Heidt place. Under the shade provided by old oak and mulberry trees, the party spent the day playing games of dominoes, cards, and checkers. At midday they paused to eat the good things from the basket. Tempted by the rustic, secluded romance of the canopied setting, an impromptu dance party arose despite the lack of music. The couples frolicked

²⁴⁹ Ash, June 30, 1863.

²⁵⁰ Ash, June 30, 1863.

with pleasure. Exhausted and exhilarated they walked back into town at the end of the day. “To live in the sunshine of [Estella’s] presence is happiness indeed!” John thought to himself just before he drifted off to sleep.²⁵¹

The next few days were busy ones for John and Estella as they participated in the social scene in Whitesville that revolved around the parlor of Mrs. Powers’ house. It was the most “convenient and accommodating” place in town. Her bright, lively daughters drew the young people to her home. In the evenings, young men and women danced on hard wood floors as the music from violin and harp filled the night air. There was also a revival going on at the Baptist Church which John and Estella attended in the afternoons.

In the midst of the social whirlwind, John carved out time to attend to the most important business for his trip to Whitesville. He and Estella talked about when they should marry and agreed on the end of December. Once they’d set a date, John found a moment to approach Mrs. Powers and formally ask for her daughter’s hand in marriage. He was overjoyed when his future mother-in-law gave her permission for Estella to become his wife.²⁵²

The evening before his time in Whitesville came to a close, John fervently wished that all the young people at Mrs. Powers’ house would go home. He desired to spend time only in her company to store up memories to tide him over until they could see one another again. When he awoke the next morning at five to catch the train back to

²⁵¹ Ash, July 1, 1863.

²⁵² Ash, July 2-4, 1863.

Savannah, Estella had woken before him and made biscuits and coffee for him to start his day. Shortly after he bid her goodbye.²⁵³

As the train chugged steadily up the tracks to Savannah, Estella stayed on his mind. When John reached the depot, he went straight to Sarah's house to ask her to go with him to have engraving done in Estella's engagement ring. Even though he'd given her a ring at Christmas, he'd purchased a new one. After he'd taken care of several errands, he went to his Mother's house for a night of rest before he returned to camp the next day.

When he reached camp, he learned that several companies were being transferred to Charleston. George, his brother, had enlisted in the Tattnal Guards. John went to tell him goodbye. A few days later with George now out of town, Susannah's little boy, Arthur, fell ill with scarlet fever. The illness ravaged his body, and he died. John left camp to be with his oldest sister as she buried her youngest child in the family vault at Laurel Grove Cemetery.²⁵⁴

Back at camp, the whole of the 5th Georgia Regiment were issued brand new blue uniforms. Up to this point, their uniforms had been mismatched. Don't "we look bully now?" John thought to himself as he viewed himself in the mirror. In addition to the sense of professionalism that the matching uniforms gave the Hussars, John was promoted to First Sergeant, a position which gave him additional leadership responsibilities.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Ash, July 7-8, 1863.

²⁵⁴ Ash, July 9-16, 1863.

²⁵⁵ Ash, July 11 & 22, 1863.

At the end of July, John's mother boarded the train to go "up the country." Her daughter from her first marriage was sick, and she went to care for her. Martha was the only one in the family who'd been excluded from receiving an inheritance in John's father's will. A few days later, John received word that Martha had died only three hours after their mother had arrived to care for her. His sister left behind four children, two of whom were so young that John's mother planned to bring them home to Savannah to finish raising them on her own. She spent a couple of months away arranging her daughter's affairs. When she arrived at the depot in Savannah, John met her to convey her and her grandchildren with their things to their new home on Taylor Street.²⁵⁶

The Ash family had suffered two deaths in only a matter of weeks, but life went on. On August 9, John left camp on permit to present Estella with the engagement ring that he'd had engraved for her. After he presented her with the ring, he took her to tea at Sarah's house. They stretched their time together as long as possible before he rode back to camp. It's good that his horse knew the way for he might not have made it otherwise. He slept in the saddle and was awakened by "boughs of trees striking [him] on the head" as the horse strayed to the edges of the road.²⁵⁷

In the short time Colonel Anderson had been leading the 5th Georgia Regiment and despite John's awkward start with him, the two had a pleasant relationship. When John approached him in his tent to ask for permits to visit Estella and to make trips to town to run errands and to purchase broadcloth to be cut for his wedding suit, Anderson "granted it with pleasure." During August, John made several trips to town to meet with

²⁵⁶ Ash, July 30 & September 20, 1863.

²⁵⁷ Ash, August 9, 2016.

Estella at Sarah's house, where she now spent much more of her time while in Savannah. The families were beginning to merge. One evening, he and Estella sat on Sarah's piazza until nearly midnight where they were "more at home, free and easy in each other's company than ever before."²⁵⁸

His beloved occupied much of his time, but John also enjoyed companionship with his friends. Upon reaching the age of eligibility, Charles Patterson, Susannah's oldest son joined the Hussars. Now, John had a close cousin in camp with him. Susannah may not have approved, having lost her youngest son so recently. Nevertheless, John, Eben, and Henry welcomed Charley to their tight knit group. John was also reunited with old friend when Abba and his brother Clinton Bacon returned to Savannah from Virginia on their first trip home since the beginning of the war.

In addition to sand gnats, fleas, and mosquitoes, bedbugs now proliferated rapidly. One afternoon John went to war with them and killed hundreds of them in an effort to rid his tent and bed from the nuisance. And the men were still exposed to the whim of the elements. One afternoon, Brigadier General Nathan George Evans arrived in camp to review the 5th Georgia Regiment. Like Anderson, Evans had also graduated from the United States Military Academy and had been commissioned as an officer in the United States Army only to resign to join the Confederacy at the outbreak of war. His reputation preceded him, and John and the others felt honored to be drilled by the well-known veteran of Bull Run, notorious for drinking in the thick of battle. Despite a sudden "hard shower of rain," General Evans removed his hat and gave the assembly a speech. At the conclusion, he rewarded them by gifting them his favorite drink, whiskey. This

²⁵⁸Ash, August 12 – 15, 1863.

was the first time John had partaken of the liquor. As he drank it, the warmth of the amber liquid warmed him from head to toe after marching in the rain.²⁵⁹

The remainder of the summer of 1863 was relatively uneventful compared to the rapid developments in the early part of the year. As the season drew to a close, John felt more satisfied than ever in camp life. When he first enlisted, everything was new and exciting. Then it became monotonous and dreary. The move back to Savannah had been a welcome relief from exile on the islands. Finally, he felt settled into his new life, and he enjoyed the increase in responsibilities that gave him purpose each day.²⁶⁰

A Wedding and a Honeymoon

Nearly three years into the war, John's relationship with Captain Wiltberger was improving. They had softened toward one another. John no longer thought him gruff and grumpy, and the captain no longer swore at him. Early in October, John went to see him about getting a special permit to go into town to see Estella. While there, John told him that he planned to get married in November. The eager couple had decided to move up their original wedding date. Captain Wiltberger responded warmly, calling him "Johnnie" and asking him who he planned to marry. John told him all about Estella, at the same time, requesting a fifteen-day furlough to have plenty time for both the wedding and a honeymoon. The captain assured John that his furlough would be approved and "wished him all the happiness he could anticipate."²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Ash, August 18-September 5, 1863.

²⁶⁰ Ash, September 25, 1863.

²⁶¹ Ash, October 6-8, 1863.

In continued preparation for his wedding, John asked Lt. James (Jimmy) Jefferson Brewer to serve as groomsman at the ceremony. Jimmy agreed to do so. They both succeeded in getting their furloughs signed. Next, John began to announce his marriage to his family and friends. When he went to tell Susannah that he was marrying Estella, she dressed him down sharply. She was offended that he hadn't told her his plans sooner and hurt that he'd told Sarah first. Susannah was his oldest sibling, but he was closer to his brother's wife than to her. In sharp contrast to his discipline of the mess cook earlier that year, he went to the home of a former servant, "Momma Catharine" to invite her to his wedding in Whitesville. He'd grown up with her caring for him, and he wished her to be at his important life event.

While slavery and the methods used to enforce it were often harsh and inhumane, there were also glimmers of mutual humanity within the system. In this instance, he saw her as fully human and not just property, but someone he valued as a person. No doubt, in her old age, she'd suffered her share of indignities as a slave. But she must have reciprocated at least a portion of the affection that John felt for her.²⁶²

In the midst of his preparations for his future, "about 1000 and 1 rumors" began percolating through camp that the company would almost surely be moved in the near future. Also, for the first time the men felt like John sided more with the officers than with themselves. While John had long resented military structure, now he'd been promoted high enough that some perceived him in the same way that he perceived other officers. Henry, his best friend expressed irritation with John, telling him that he felt insulted by John's treatment of him. John tried to make things right, but Henry's stubborn

²⁶² Ash, October 18 & 22, November 16, 1863.

personality refused to accept John's reasoning. Shortly after this, Captain Wiltberger rearranged the messes of the company and divided them equally into four groups. A few in the mess John was assigned objected to sharing meals with him, so he requested that he be moved to a more agreeable mess.²⁶³

This time, the rumors of being marched out of the Savannah area turned out to be true, rather than unfounded as so many times before. Before they left, John was allowed to visit Estella in Whitesville. When he arrived, Estella was "looking her prettiest." The two of them stayed up talking late into the night, "as lovers are wont to do . . . and [felt love's] influence melting and uniting [their] hearts as one." This would be the last time they would see one another before their wedding day. As their brief time together came to an end, John prayed "May our happy wedding day hasten to appear . . . and then or even now, can the sweet influence of Peace of our country come too soon to enable us to rejoice together over the return of that inestimable blessing."²⁶⁴

On the morning of October 26, the bugle played Boots and Saddles, and the 5th Georgia Regiment formed to march out. As the line formed and slowly made its way into Savannah, the column stretched for one and a half miles along the Thunderbolt Road. "It resembled ancient pictures representing the pageantry of old days of European chivalry and wars." As the column passed through Savannah, the "old cook" who had served John's family met him on the road and "invoked the blessing of heaven upon [him]."

²⁶³ Ash, October 15-17, 1863.

²⁶⁴ Ash, Octboer 20 & 21, 1863.

Here again was another example of either the glimmer of mutual affection or a show of the cook's face that she reserved for the master class.²⁶⁵

With Savannah fading out of view to John's rear he felt "that [he] would not be able to contain [himself]" as he left home if it were not for the comfort of "the thought of returning home again soon to loved ones, and especially to the loving embrace of my own dear Estella." On and on they marched along the Augusta Road. That afternoon they stopped to make camp at Monteith. Henry and John had reconciled by this point, and they chose to sleep underneath a pine tree "with not shelter over [their] heads but the bright blue canopy of heaven, while the silver moon shone for [them] in all its splendor and brilliancy."²⁶⁶

In the next few days, John seized the opportunity to see his family that lived in Effingham County. He stopped in at the home of his brother-in-law, Benjamin Grovenstein who lived near Ebenezer. Onward they marched, through Robertsville where they passed into South Carolina. At Robertsville, the town prepared a feast to welcome the 5th Georgia. Potatoes, peas and rice, biscuits, pork, ham, and fowls piled high on the tables complimented by barrels of pickles and boiled peanuts and baskets of roasted peanuts. As the sated men left the tables, they cheered the "ladies of South Carolina" in thanks for preparing such a delicious meal for them.

They journeyed on through Gillisonville, where John noted the dilapidated state of public buildings and the existence of only a few small homes. At Potaligo, they halted. President Jefferson Davis was on a train returning from a visit to Savannah. The

²⁶⁵ Ash, October 26, 1863.

²⁶⁶ Ash, October 26, 1863.

5th Georgia marched to a field near the railroad and assembled in formation. When the train came to a halt, the president didn't come out to greet the troops. Instead they fired a twelve gun salute in his honor.²⁶⁷

For several days, the regiment remained at Potaligo, as John grew more anxious every second. Even though his furlough had been signed, he was scared that he would be denied permission to leave when the day came. As his wedding day approached, he was haunted by nightmares in addition to his daytime anxiety. On November 12, the order was read to march to Adam's Run. Further away from Savannah and on the march, Captain Wiltberger assured him that Colonel Anderson would allow him to leave to get married.²⁶⁸

When he awoke refreshed on the morning of November 13, "all the boys [told him that he looked] as smiling as a basket of chips." The next couple of days in camp passed with eager anticipation of his wedding. On the morning he was set to leave, he "shook hands with nearly all the boys." He was sad that Henry had to stay in camp and couldn't come with him to be married. John and Lt. Brewer purchased tickets to ride the train to Savannah. As they boarded the "old iron horse," they overheard the news that General Beauregard had promised a reward of twenty days furlough to anyone who arrested deserters and returned them.

When the train stopped to take on riders at the Coosawhatchie depot, John peered through the dusty window to see a familiar face from the regiment slipping onto "the negro car." Miles down the track, he pondered whether he should collar the wayward

²⁶⁷ Ash, October 27 – November 2, 1863.

²⁶⁸ Ash, November 5 – 12, 1863.

man to get the extra furlough. Lt. Brewer discussed it with him and generously offered to let John apply the furlough on his own, since he was getting married and needed it more. As the train drew to a halt again, the two of them surprised the deserter and told him he was under arrest. When he tried to escape, John grabbed him by the nape of his neck and told him not to move. That night when the train pulled into the Savannah depot, John and Lt. Brewer took the deserter to be lodged in the jail. It was past dinner time, and John hadn't eaten since breakfast that morning. "He was too happy to eat." Without pausing to take a bath, he made it in time for Sunday services that evening at the Baptist Church where he visited with Susannah. Like Henry, he and Susannah had also mended fences.²⁶⁹

On the morning of his twentieth birthday and his wedding day, John rose before the sun. He met Lizzie and Sarah, and they walked with him to the depot to ride with him to Whitesville for the wedding. There's no mention of his mother in travel arrangement. It's possible that she stayed home due to the adjustment of caring for the children. John's mind was a whirl on the two hour ride to his bride's home. He couldn't wait to kiss Estella hello. That afternoon before the wedding he went with Paul Elkins down to Mr. Guyton's place to get some sugar cane to go with the oranges he'd brought for the wedding dinner. They'd boarded the train to go, but there was no stop at the house, so they jumped. John fell head first to the ground as his body tumbled in a somersault.

When he and Paul returned to Mrs. Powers, he went to his room to dress and wait for the ceremony to begin. About seven in the evening, the wedding party assembled. The attendants preceded the bride and groom into the parlor. At first John felt nervous as they stood before family and friends, but he relaxed as Reverend Landrum administered the

²⁶⁹ Ash, November 15, 1863.

vows which omitted any mention of love, honor, or obedience. The ceremony was short, and a night of celebration followed. Cake and wine were served first, followed by a very late dinner. “The frolic was kept up all night, and oh how sleepy did [they] get! After midnight and on toward the next morning you might see some of the men laying here and others there.” There were so many guests that there were not sufficient accommodations at Mrs. Powers’ house. “One has appropriated to himself the settee, two or three are lying on the sofa, one perhaps sleeps in a chair, while another hides himself and sleeps on the floor behind the settee.” Propriety kept the ladies “bravely sitting up” all night.²⁷⁰

The next morning, the newly married couple prepared for their “wedding tour.” Estella wanted to take John to visit the Female College in Greensboro to meet her teachers and friends, and to see how she’d spent her time while he was in camp. They boarded the train, which stopped for lunch in Millen. Arriving in Augusta that evening, they checked into the Globe Hotel. It had been at least thirty-six hours since either of them had slept. Together, they rested for the first time in the same bed. They spent the next day and night in Augusta touring the town before they took the next train to Greensboro.²⁷¹

When they arrived in Greensboro that evening, Estella’s friends met them at the station. John had “heard Estella speak of them so often that they [were] familiar” to him already. Over the next few days Estella introduced John to Mrs. Parsons, the principal and Mr. Barclay, the music teacher and a host of other friends. On a tour of the college, he viewed the laboratory and the library and was shown experiments that the students

²⁷⁰ Ash, November 17, 1863.

²⁷¹ Ash, November 18 & 19, 1863.

were working on. Estella had taught Sabbath School while at the college, and John met all her young students. As Estella showed him what her life had been like, the couple grew closer.²⁷²

They had thought of visiting Macon, but on the morning of November 24, they decided to return home the same way they'd came. When they arrived at the Augusta stop, they departed the train to stay at the Globe Hotel again. This time they were more familiar with one another after a week of marriage. When they arrived at Estella's and now John's home in Whitesville, they spent a few happy days. Estella played the piano for John. They took long moonlit strolls on the railroad tracks. Domesticity was bliss for the young couple as they settled into married life. John encouraged Estella to continue her music lessons, and he planned to "study and endeavor to please and promote the happiness of [his] own dear Stella more and more now since I am married than I had thought to do before."²⁷³

With heavy hearts, John and Estella took the train to Savannah so they could visit with John's mother before he returned to camp. The end of their happiest of interludes was ending. War forced them to return to the alternate reality of their lives. "With very great reluctance and deep regret" John hugged his orphaned nephews, his aging mother, and his new bride goodbye on November 30. Estella sent her journals and composition book from school with John for him to read on the train ride back to Adam's Run where

²⁷² Ash, November 20-24, 1863.

²⁷³ Ash, November 25-28, 1863.

the 5th Georgia had been moved in his absence. His pain at leaving was assuaged by the sweet gesture.²⁷⁴

When he returned to camp, he found the men hard at work building log houses for shelter. The weather had turned bitterly cold, and walls of the canvas tents were too thick to keep them warm. John managed to hold himself together during the day, but the first couple of nights back were difficult. He slept in the bed with Henry as he always did. During the night, he would snuggle close to Henry. In his sleep, he mistook him for the now familiar body of Estella. Waking and finding the person he snuggled was Henry instead of his beloved wife, he found himself moved to tears with longing for her.²⁷⁵

During the week he spent back in camp, he worked to secure his furlough as a reward for turning in a deserter. Henry helped him arrange the paperwork, Colonel Anderson signed it, and General Beauregard approved it. In the meantime, he also heard that the 5th Georgia might be moved to Green Pond. But he left for home again under the fortuitous furlough before any orders came through. As he boarded the train loaded down with his own things as well as packages and letters the men of his company sent with him to deliver to their loved ones, he thought to himself. "When I was going home to be married I felt delighted and happy but going home this time to the loving and affectionate embrace of a wife I feel ten times happier. "Thinking these cheerful thoughts, he wished such joy for all. "If marriage brings as much happiness to every one as it has to me, I think everybody ought to get married."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Ash, November 30, 1863.

²⁷⁵ Ash, December 1 & 2, 1863.

²⁷⁶ Ash, December 4-11, 1863.

Estella had come to Savannah to stay with her new mother-in-law while she awaited John's return. They stayed the next day with her, but they were eager to get to their own home in Whitesville. John no longer referred to his mother's house as home. Estella no longer lived with her mother and sister. They'd created their own snug little nest in a house of their own. To make up for not going to Macon on their honeymoon, they made a quick trip to visit with friends and family there before returning to spend Christmas together in the glow of their own home. All too soon, 1863 drew to a close, and it was time for John to return to his military duties.²⁷⁷

The War Gets Real

New Year's Day 1864 marked John's first day back in camp following his second furlough. Cold wind blew about him as he busily worked writing reports and helping Henry and a few others build a house for themselves. They also worked to build a house for Captain Wiltberger. He had been at home in Savannah recuperating from an extended illness. Upon his arrival back in camp, John noted that he didn't look as if he'd fully returned to health. The men joked amongst themselves and gambled their paychecks away to pass the time. Homesick as he was, the weather made the days harder to endure. And signs of the soldiers' discontent made themselves clear.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Ash, December 11-31, 1863.

²⁷⁸ Ash, January 1-11, 1864.

In an effort to maintain order in the camp, Captain Wiltberger felt compelled to write an order remonstrating with his company. “The Commanding Officer,” he began . . . has noticed with regret the deep rooted feeling of selfishness manifested in the Troop.” He went on to remind his men that the hardships of military life required cooperation. The weary captain concluded, It is earnestly recommended and desired therefore, that the men will exercise a more benevolent and kind spirit toward each other, and the whole Troop, be more of a unit than they have been heretofore.”²⁷⁹

Many of John’s thoughts focused on the Scriptures; he honestly worked to apply their principles in his own life, and he attended services as often as they were available. He’d spoken with Reverend Landrum before about his calling to join the ministry. Now, motivated by a desire to leave the military, he wrote to Landrum for help with becoming ordained. He wanted nothing more than for the war to be over. Failing peace, he was willing to take whatever steps he could to return home.²⁸⁰

Late in January Colonel Anderson took a trip to Richmond, Virginia, the seat of the Confederacy. Talk abounded that he stood a chance to be promoted to brigadier general. If such was the case, Captain Wiltberger would be promoted to major. John, likewise, would be promoted to lieutenant. This may have been some small consolation to John, as his hopes for getting out of the service were dashed when he learned that only those who were ordained prior to March 1862 could be exempted. “Now [he] had no hope but to wait until the war shall end.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Ash, January 14, 1864.

²⁸⁰ Ash, January 19, 1864.

²⁸¹ Ash, January 30, 1864.

Clothing was scarce. When the government sent supplies, there wasn't enough to go around. Soldiers drew straws to determine who would receive what small item of clothing. Rations grew also grew scarce, and the men decided to limit themselves to only two meals a day so those meals would be a little more substantial. The cook slipped John extra treats every now and then. On picket, the Hussars were closer to enemy lines than before. At night, they could see the glow of Yankee fires in the distance. Still having avoided engagement, John thought his company could "give them a brush" if there was a confrontation.²⁸²

On Estella's twentieth birthday, John thought of her as he talked with Captain Wiltberger. The two of them had grown quite close. John may have viewed him as a father figure since he'd lost his father as the war began, and the captain had no son of his own. They talked over the change in command should Colonel Anderson be promoted. The captain encouraged him in pursuing the lieutenancy, as John confided that many of the men in the company supported him in doing so.²⁸³

Late at night on Valentine's Day, just as John was dozing off, an eruption of excited noise filled the camp and disturbed his sleep. There was news that the 5th Georgia Regiment would be sent to Florida to assist in deterring Federal forces gathered there. On the morning march "the men [were] all in fine spirits about going to Georgia once more, for even in passing through to Florida we will stop about Savannah awhile."²⁸⁴

²⁸² Ash, February 1-5, 1864.

²⁸³ Ash, February 8-11, 1864.

²⁸⁴ Ash, February 14 & 15, 1864.

Three days later after the men had reverse marched through Coosawhatchie, Gillisonville, and Robertsville, they arrived at their first camp site at Monteith. Ten miles from Savannah, John was desperate to go to his mother's house where he knew Estella was visiting. As Captain Wiltberger had already refused for permission for other men to go to town, John went straight to Major Davant for permission instead. Davant gave permission providing the captain didn't mind. When John went to him to confirm his permission, the captain told him no, not knowing that the major had already approved the request. John hotly told him that "it was hard to be thus treated." In his temper and frustration, he prepared to leave camp without permission. Wiltberger called him back after checking with the major and told him he could go. He slipped into the Taylor Street house before Estella even knew he was there. "Is that you Johnnie?" she asked, and then she was in his arms.²⁸⁵

He spent one last day at home before his company would begin the trip by railway to Florida. His beard had grown very long, so he shaved his face clean. "The boys scarcely knew him," when he reported to camp for a permit to stay out until midnight. But he had no intention of returning to camp that night. As he prepared for bed with Estella, he asked his mother to wake him at three in the morning, so he'd have time to slip back into camp before roll call.

This march would be different. John and the others struggled as they loaded wagons and horses onto train cars to ride the rails southwards. After they loaded everything they would need, the men piled onto the open air cars. Exposed to the wind

²⁸⁵ Ash, February 18, 1864.

that whistled past them, they found it hard to keep warm. So overcrowded were the two long trains that one of the horses fell off and was killed.²⁸⁶

When at last they arrived in Valdosta, John's feet had nearly frozen, and they felt as if they were on fire as he warmed them. To make matters worse, someone had stolen a ham and biscuits from his haversack. He lay hungry under blankets on the ground that night.²⁸⁷

Finding food to fill his empty stomach was the first order of business the next day. He and a friend named Sam explored the small town of Valdosta. They ran into a slave selling eggs and purchased a couple dozen. Walking a little further to the main house, they knocked on the door and asked for milk. The young lady of the house sent out a pint of milk in a pitcher for the two to share and invited them to come in. John declined, but then the tinkling of a piano reached his ears. John and Sam agreed to visit if they continued playing. While resting in the parlor, Sam was looking at a display of ambrotypes on a table. When he complimented the beauty of the woman in the photo, their hostesses became embarrassed. "A favored servant" was the subject of the ambrotype, and it shouldn't have been on display, they explained. John observed that the person in the picture appeared to be white. Surely the two of them had encountered enslaved people of such light complexions in Savannah. More likely the incident made an impression on them because of the oddity of her having been photographed as one of the family.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Ash, February 19 & 20, 1864.

²⁸⁷ Ash, February 21, 1864.

²⁸⁸ Ash, February 22, 1864.

After two wasted days, the 5th Georgia was assembled to march to Ocean Pond. John saddled up excitedly, “Here we go!’ We will fight Yankees however on bread and water and hard treatment too.” After a hard day of bumpy riding, he took to his bed sick with diarrhea. Onward they marched on poor rations. As John and Henry sat on a fence eating rice with wood scoops for spoons, they heard that Union forces had retreated to Jacksonville. The 5th Georgia had arrived too late to participate in the Battle of Olustee or Ocean Pond.

At Lake City, wounded Union soldiers had been captured and held. When the 5th Georgia stopped there to rest, a curious John went to peer at them. He taunted about a dozen of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, holding up a hard, overcooked biscuit and telling them that he would continue to fight them even while eating such undesirable food. These brave men had suffered losses at Battery Wagner and James Island, along with the death of their leader, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. Only days earlier, their regiment had stood in the gap providing cover for all the white regiments to take to their heels and retreat after Confederate forces had soundly defeated them at Olustee. All of this they had done bravely, taking the line of battle crying, “Three Cheers for Massachusetts and seven dollars a month!” Their battle cry was a continuation of their long protest of refusing their pay because it was only half of what was paid to white enlisted soldiers. Two of them lay dying as John spoke with them.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Ash, February 23-27, 1864; Robert P. Broadwater. *The Battle of Olustee, 1864: The Final Union Attempt to Seize Florida* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006) p. 120.

This ugly scene highlights the sacrifices these battle weary soldiers had made in their fight for equality within the United States Army at the same time they gave their lives to preserve the Union and earn freedom for their enslaved brethren. In contrast, John had spent most of the war camped near home, had just returned from several weeks furlough with his new bride, and had still not participated in a military engagement. While the wounded men had given great thought to what they were fighting for, it's not at all clear that John had. Only seventeen when he enlisted, it's almost as if the rolling tide of history swept him into the military on a wave of patriotic fervor. The only motivations that he spoke of were honor and duty, the twin virtues that had been engrained in him from the time of his birth as he grew up in southern society. These were the bonds that held the south together. At the same time, he longed for the war to end so that he could return to civilian life. Maybe confronting the soldiers despite his lack of battle experience felt as if he was entering the fray for the first time. More than that, the verbal slap in the face that he delivered to the enemy as they lay on cots suffering from their injuries is an example of the brutality that existed in a slaveholding society. Whites of all economic and social classes were accustomed to venting frustration on blacks. John's mindset, like most Southerners, was one that made it impossible for him to recognize African American men as equals, let alone to recognize the valor they displayed on the battle ground.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Ash, February 23-27, 1864; Robert P. Broadwater. *The Battle of Olustee, 1864: The Final Union Attempt to Seize Florida* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006) p. 120.

A few days later, he was to feel the terror of being under fire for the first time. The Hussars met with the enemy as they marched, and the two sides formed up for a skirmish. As the shells burst over John's head, "he felt uneasy," but he held his ground on horseback and armed with a pistol and sword. At the end of the day, he felt "all right again" when he "learned that no more fighting is expected." His cornbread and bacon tasted better than usual that night, after the events of the day. Later, the government would issue the men rifles, so they'd "have something to fight with."²⁹¹

The weeks John spent in Florida with the 5th Georgia were miserable ones. Rations were cut; parched corn replaced corn meal. When his teeth hurt from chewing the kernels of corn, he learned to grind it to make a rough sort of bread. To make matters worse, he squatted over the wrong plant in the woods and "his parts were poisoned." Life was wretched. One evening he found himself so hungry that he didn't even bother cooking, he just ate the bacon raw. To add insult to injury, one of his tent mates had "the itch." He and Henry tried to tell the man to move from the tent. When he didn't, they burned the whole thing. As John and his companions endured hardships in the theater of war, the enemy near them also suffered. Things were bad all over. Everyone was sick of war. Day after day, "Yankees" evaded their own pickets to cross enemy lines and desert to the Confederate pickets.²⁹²

Despite the discomfort he experienced, John still desired to improve himself. Henry sat him down one day and told him that he'd observed a fault in John "of opposing the company officers too stoutly in every little thing and taking up for the men even

²⁹¹ Ash, March 1 & 3, 1864.

²⁹² Ash, March 7 – April 20, 1864.

though it effected no good.” Considering the advice of his trusted friend, “John determined to be more friendly with [the] officers yet not to sacrifice [his] principles.” After a day of focusing on his attitude, John felt satisfied that he’d improved, which was his duty to do so.²⁹³

On “a bright warm first of May” John heard that his regiment would march back to Green Pond, where they’d been before they were ordered to Florida. After several days of riding the men reached the vicinity of Savannah, the leadership allowed several men to go home on furlough, and John “rejoiced [in his heart]” to be going home to Estella. They boarded a train for the remainder of the trip back to Savannah, but only “negro cars” were available. By the time he switched trains in Savannah and made his way to Whitesville, he was very sick. While out in the woods before leaving, he’d climbed atop an old pine stump, lost his balance, and tumbled to the ground. His thumb caught on the stump and a big splinter jammed into his knuckle. Finding it impossible to remove the splinter, it had festered to the point that it was badly infected.²⁹⁴

For much of May, Estella cared for him in their Whitesville home. Dr. Lawton came and dosed him and finally lanced the joint to remove the splinter. A few days he felt well enough to go fishing, and Estella went with him. The two of them basked in the glow of their togetherness. Even the weather couldn’t affect their happiness, as the rain fell, they continued fishing. This would be the last of pleasant times with Estella, and John likely cherished the thought of these days for the rest of his life.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ash, April 15, 1864.

²⁹⁴ Ash, April 26 – May 7, 1864.

²⁹⁵ Ash, May 9-21, 1864.

When he felt well enough to travel, John and Estella rode the rails to Savannah to visit with his mother and the children. In town, they visited the Baptist Church where Reverend Landrum called upon John to lead the congregation in prayer. This was the first time he'd prayed publicly. It was a significant step toward his goal of becoming a minister. News reached the city that fighting had begun in upper Georgia as General William T. Sherman marched from Tennessee towards Atlanta. Much as he hated to leave his wife and mother, it was time for him to rejoin his regiment.²⁹⁶

In north Georgia, John quickly encountered danger as the Hussars frequently skirmished with Union forces. The entire month of June is missing from his journals. Near Decatur, John and two or three others were being chased by Federal cavalry when they came to a river they couldn't cross. He was so sure that he would be captured and become a prisoner of war that he destroyed the small journal in his pocket. With that, the month of June was lost. As shells of battle burst over their heads, the men hid in the deep overgrowth of trees and bushes along the bank of the river until it was safe to return to camp. It had been the intention of the officers to "sacrifice a few to save the rest." Needless to say, John did not approve of such a plan.²⁹⁷

In July, the Union and Confederate armies clashed almost daily. As Confederate forces attempted to defend Atlanta from the Union onslaught, John hoped that General Joseph Johnston would "give Sherman a good whipping." Both sides fought over supply

²⁹⁶ Ash, May 24 – 29, 1864.

²⁹⁷ Ash, July 1 – 6, 1864.

lines. Casualties piled up, and Henry was captured in the fighting at Noonday Church.” In the absence of major battles, the cavalry engaged in minor skirmishes again and again.²⁹⁸

July ended with some success for the 5th Georgia regiment as the men fought under the command of General Joseph Wheeler near Newnan. General Sherman had directed Brigadier General Edward McCook’s cavalry on a raid to cut communication and supply lines to handicap the Confederates and also to free the Union prisoners of war being held at Andersonville. When Wheeler heard of this, he sent the Hussars galloping to intercept McCook’s cavalry. General Anderson led them in “firing and dashing upon the foe.” Unexpectedly, McCook’s reinforcements failed to arrive to support him. Wheeler’s cavalry managed to utterly defeat him. Wheeler only suffered thirty casualties, but McCook took more than a thousand casualties and lost two thousand men as prisoners of war along with equipment and horses. In an outstanding victory for Wheeler, he also freed five hundred Confederates who had been captured earlier in battles. Up to this point, this was the biggest and most important engagement John had been involved in.²⁹⁹

In August, John fell ill and had to report to a hospital for a stay to recuperate. While laid up in a hospital bed, he contemplated finding a house to rent near Atlanta and bringing Estella to live with him. From his limited perspective, this seemed reasonable. He had no idea how quickly the end of the war approached. When he recovered enough to be released, he returned to camp. Atlanta fell in early September and the 5th Georgia regiment fell back. Discipline began to wane in the face of defeat. One afternoon when

²⁹⁸ Ash, July 9-28, 1864.

²⁹⁹ Ash, July 30, 1864.

Boots & Saddles sounded, John didn't even bother reporting as the officers were too drunk to notice.³⁰⁰

With Sherman in Atlanta and after four years of war, supplies were scarce. Soldiers and cavalrymen got food as best they could often to the detriment of citizens. There was no ammunition to be had, so John sent his rifle home to Estella. He thought it a redundant weight for his horse to carry with no bullets to fire. The regiment was in a state of disorganization. A couple of officers offered John positions with their companies, but he preferred to stay with the Hussars and the 5th Georgia.³⁰¹

It had been weeks since John had heard from Estella. When he ran into Lt. Brewer who had returned from Macon, he mentioned the lack of letters from home. Brewer had seen Hattie Guyton on his trip, who told him that Mrs. Powers had fallen ill and died. Estella was taking her mother's death very hard and was also sick in bed. "The sad news [hit John] like a hard slap." He'd hoped that the lack of letters was because of poor mail delivery. "Today is a sad and gloomy Sabbath to me, and I do not feel like myself at all," he thought to himself as he planned to ask for a furlough to go home to his grieving wife.³⁰²

His request for a furlough was denied. Fannie Heidt wrote to him telling him that Estella was very sick. Knowing that General Anderson was in Savannah, John and a group of men discussed going home without leave, expecting him to grant them leniency. Others having the same plan left camp before they did. In response to the desertion, a

³⁰⁰ Ash, August 16 – September 4, 1864.

³⁰¹ Ash, September 9 -16, 1864.

³⁰² Ash, October 2, 1864.

strong guard was placed around the camp. John and his group didn't get to sneak away to go home. Still, others continued to find a way to leave without permission of the officers.³⁰³

Finally, with much persuasion, he managed to get a ten day furlough signed. He mounted up and pointed his mare southwards toward home. She carried him for six days across the state of Georgia. John stopped at people's houses to eat, but sometimes he failed to find food for his horse. Well after midnight on the sixth day, he made it to Uncle Hezzy's house. The family was asleep, but woke when John knocked to make supper for him.³⁰⁴

From Halcyondale to Whitesville, he hoped that Estella would be up to meet him when he arrived at "sweet home," but she was sick in bed. John wrote to his mother to come to Whitesville to see him, and he stayed with Estella for the remaining week of his furlough. Just before he left to return to his command in North Georgia, his wife seemed to rally. Seeing her feeling better, John hoped that she would continue to recover. He was torn, "I hate to leave her, but I must away and return to my command do my duty believing that God who rules will make all things work together for good to those who love God and keep his commandments."³⁰⁵

Kissing his beloved wife goodbye, John began the long journey back to the front of the war. Home faded in the background as he answered the strong call of duty, which even a sick wife couldn't cause him to shirk. On the eleventh of November as he rode

³⁰³ Ash, October 8 & 9, 1864.

³⁰⁴ Ash, October 24-29, 1864.

³⁰⁵ Ash, October 30 – November 6, 1864.

along the dusty road, after five days of travel, his gaze drifted to the sky. “In the West a red, bright, and glaring cloud” captured his attention. It was “of size and shape like a coffin. Three smaller clouds like birds were at the north end of the large cloud, and one at the south.” He “at once imagined that what I saw represented Stella’s death, and could not repel the thought.”³⁰⁶

On his birthday and the first anniversary of his wedding, a letter was delivered to John from his mother. She’d written to tell him that Estella died on the same day that he’d seen the clouds in the sky. He did not record any of his feelings upon receiving the letter. In the next few days, he recorded the details of his movements and noted that he’d written a new will. It was as if he’d completely shut down emotionally. Only the previous year he’d filled page after page after page with how deeply he loved his new bride and how overjoyed he felt when in her presence. When he had to leave her after their wedding trip, he was overwhelmed with sorrow. How much more must all of those feelings have been intensified for him as he learned of her death? He may have even blamed himself for choosing duty rather than staying a few more days to be at her side when she passed from this life. As he dealt with this great loss, his writing trailed off and he wrote nothing at all for the final month of 1864. Words failed him as he struggled with loss.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Ash, November 11, 1864.

³⁰⁷ Ash, November 17-29, 1864.

In the time that passed before John pen in hand once more, Sherman and his troops had marched across Georgia and waited outside of Savannah. No attack was needed for the general to secure the town. As mayor, Dr. Richard Arnold met with the aldermen. Together, they came to the conclusion to surrender the city to the Federal Army. A coalition ventured outside of town to meet with the enemy, and they offered up the city. In their desire to save the city from destruction, they sacrificed it to redeem it. Sherman took up residence at the home of Charles Green and telegraphed President Lincoln the news of his arrival on the coast, wittily offering Savannah as a Christmas gift.

On January 18, Sherman was still in Savannah. John woke up that morning near Lawtonville, South Carolina having dreamed during the night that he was back in Savannah at his mother's house. It wasn't a pleasant dream. After just losing his wife, he dreamed that he was attending his mother's death bed. But the war still went on. On picket duty in February, the Hussars skirmished with Sherman's cavalry after they had crossed the Savannah River and began their march into South Carolina.³⁰⁸

Wheeler had begun to march towards Augusta when he turned toward Columbia instead. General Beauregard had ordered him to do so. His intentions were to intercept Sherman at the state capital. It was bitterly cold. The rain froze as it fell and coated everything with ice. The crystalline beauty of ice-covered trees escaped John and the others as their clothes, hats, and beards were also trimmed with icicles.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Ash, January 18 – February 10, 1864.

³⁰⁹ Ash, February 14, 1865.

John may have wished for that ice a couple of days later. Sherman marched on Columbia and Wheeler's cavalry was completely overwhelmed. To save his cavalymen and himself from falling to the enemy, Wheeler ordered the Broad River bridge to be ignited. Racing through the flames, his men reached the other side to safety. Sherman's troops didn't dare pursue them across the fiery death trap. The 5th Georgia escaped with their lives, but many suffered severe burns.³¹⁰

Following their escapade in Columbia, Wheeler's men continued marching across South Carolina and northwards into North Carolina. Many men gave up and went home. They had no more stomach for war, and they could see the end coming. Charley Patterson, John's cousin and Susannah's son was one of them. John dutifully fought until the very last to defend the failed Confederate experiment, but he was finally forced to surrender in Greensboro, North Carolina.

³¹⁰ Ash, February 16, 1865.

CHAPTER 5

LIFE AFTER THE WAR

Interim

Shortly after John was paroled, he made his way back into Savannah. Finally, the war was over, he was home, and he could look toward the future. It's hard to say in what ways the war had changed him. When he enlisted in the Confederate Army he had been little more than a boy, but now he was a man. He'd fallen in love, married, and suffered the devastating loss of his young wife while serving with honor and duty. John's family had lived in Savannah for more than a hundred years, but he was no longer satisfied there. The end of the war changed Savannah and the South. African Americans who lived in the city were no longer property. Whites who had previously invested in slaves lost their capital with emancipation. City dwellers could no longer draw income from leasing out servants to others. Now they had to find other ways to earn income.

John wanted to farm and minister. In his time at Whitesville with Estella, he'd come to think of Effingham County as his home. At Estella's grave at Powers Baptist Church, he had a simple stone erected. "My wife, Estella A. Ash. Died November 11, 1864. Aged 20 years, 9 months, and 3 days." He could have inherited at least a portion of her property with her death, so he had a beginning there.

As his dream had predicted, his mother died in June of 1866, a year after he returned from war. Sarah Ash was sixty-one years old. At her death, he inherited the home his father had built for the two of them. He held onto his Savannah properties and collected rent for some time after that. With the loss of their grandmother, his sister's two orphaned sons came to live with John in Effingham County.

In December of 1866, John married Laura V. Dasher. The newly married couple moved to Tusculum, a stop on the railroad several miles north of Whitesville on the Central of Georgia railroad. They quickly began making their own little family. Their first born was Sarah, named for John's mother and sister in law. A year later, Ida was born. Little more than a year later, Laura gave birth again, this time to a son that they named George in honor of John's father, grandfather, and brother. With the war over, despite his losses, John determinedly rebuilt his life and looked forward to a bright future with his young family.

While he farmed, he began the process of entering the ministry. In 1867, Cowpen Baptist Church, ordained him as a deacon. By 1871, he had transferred membership to Elam Baptist Church. It was in that little church in the pine grove where he finally received his license to preach.³¹¹

³¹¹ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* (Compiled for the Christian index: Atlanta, GA, 1881) p. 12-13.

Heartrending Tragedy

Tusculum, Georgia
July 23, 1871
Sunday

As the day turned to night, the natural light in the house slowly faded away. Along with the light went some of the heat from the long summer day. Though still very muggy, at least the air wasn't so stiflingly oppressive anymore now that the sun had gone down. A breeze stirred the curtain hanging over the open windows. Laura may have puttered in the kitchen finishing the last tidying up from the light supper she'd prepared for her family. The voices of John and their friend George Patterson could be heard talking in the next room as the children played. George was visiting from Savannah for a few days. It was only an hour or so away by train.

Laura walked into the room where they were. "I believe I'll write a letter," she said abruptly. This behavior was a continuation of a series of odd traits that had been causing John to be concerned about her well being. She had been somewhat distant all day. After Sunday services earlier in the day, John had been concerned enough to talk with his friend and neighbor James D. Lee about her state of mind. She had taken little interest in any of the children; Sarah, almost three, Ida, almost two, or little six-month old baby George. John may have attempted to draw her out of herself by inviting her to go fishing with them in the afternoon a pastime, that he often enjoyed.

After her comment of the need to write a letter, she sat down at John's desk and opened the drawer to take out pen and paper. Having retrieved them, she arranged them on the desktop. She next reached for a box of matches to light the lamp, as the room was now hazy from the dusk that had fallen outside. Observing her preparations, John rose to

his feet, asking George if he'd like to come out on the porch for an evening cigar. George got to his feet to follow. He thought that'd be just the thing to keep the mosquitoes at bay while they enjoyed the cool of the evening.

As the two men went to go out the screen door to the porch, the two little girls, Sarah and Ida, rushed to follow. "Daddy, can we play outside?" they asked. "Of course, my darlings." He scooped them up and carried them out. After he had deposited them on the lawn, he took a seat in a chair on the porch. Removing a cigar from a case in his trouser pocket, he offered one to George. Striking a match, he held it to the tip of the cigar, drawing and puffing to make sure it was smoothly lit. George followed suit.

John began to talk with George about how strange Laura had been acting lately. In addition to her withdrawn mood of the day, she'd been especially melancholy lately, not taking interest in the children, sleeping more than usual, going for long walks away from the house, just acting weirdly out of sorts in general. He'd been so concerned about the behavior of his young wife that he had taken his concerns to a neighbor who had known Laura in childhood. They had suggested that he consult with Laura's brothers. Earlier in the evening, John sent his nephew Charles on an errand to Robert Dasher's house a few miles away to Robert Dasher's house to tell him John wished him to visit his sister.

The tip of John's cigar glowed red, as he drew on it contemplating what help Laura's older brother might be able to give him. She was always so happy after the birth of Sarah and Ida. If her mood was caused by depression after the new baby boy's birth, it was something new entirely. He wondered aloud whether it might be because she was upset with her brothers. This was something that she had complained to him about

recently. His friend, George, took that in. He glanced in the window at Laura bent over the paper writing furiously. "This damn heat makes everything seem worse too. Doesn't seem like it will ever be cool again."

The two men chuckled, and the mood lightened a little. "Maybe we can go bathing tomorrow, and someone can keep the babies." John thought. "That might help. In the meantime, I'll just keep an eye on her." They finished smoking their cigars, watching the little girls play. Finally, John called them to him on the porch, telling them that it was time to go in and get ready for bed.

Opening the screen door to go back inside John called to Laura. "Two little girls are ready for their mother to get them ready for bed," he told her. She barely looked up from her writing. "I'm not finished with my letter," she said. "Why don't you get them to wash their faces and hands, and I'll come change them into their night clothes and tuck them in."

"Come girls, let's go get today's dirt washed off of you." They followed him into their room, protesting a little. He poured water from the pitcher to the basin and picked up the soap and a sponge. As he bathed the girls' faces, hands, and feet, he talked to them about their day. He thought to himself how lucky he was to be a father to the little ones. They brought to mind his younger sister when they were children.

Laura, finally finished with her letter, came in to dress the girls in their nightgowns. John stood for a moment and watched her as she tended to the girls. "Why don't you just let them sleep with us in our room tonight?" he suggested, thinking that maybe that would help. "That would be fine" Laura replied as she rummaged through a drawer in the bureau.

He left the room to go bid his friend George good night and to bring baby George into their bedroom. As he walked into the main room, he noticed the letter Laura had written lying on his desk. He picked it up and skimmed the contents. He couldn't really tell who it was meant to be addressed to, but it was a diatribe complaining about her brothers and their cool treatment of her as of late.

Picking up the baby, cradle and all, he looked into it at the sleeping boy thinking how much he had grown. When John reached the bedroom, Laura was already in bed with Sarah and Ida. She watched him as he set the cradle with baby George in it near the bed. John quickly stripped off his shirt and pants and sluiced off at the basin before crawling into bed beside Laura in his underclothes. He may have thought about trying to talk to her about what might be bothering her, but it was enough for him that she had turned to him. Thoughts of what he needed to get done on the farm the next morning filled his head as he drifted off to sleep.

Several hours later about three o'clock in the morning, John awoke to the sound of the children crying. Reaching over to feel the bed beside him, his hand only found empty space in the bed. What on earth? Maybe one of them is sick, he thought. He sat up and lit the lamp beside the bed. Across the room, Laura sat on the floor holding a spoon. Sarah had struggled not to take the bitter potion that her mother offered her, and her cries woke her father. Ida and baby George in his cradle were beside them. John begged Laura to tell him what she had given the children. "I have only given them a little powder, and I'm afraid that I have not given them enough," she replied. The children were crying loudly. Something was very wrong.

"What kind of powder did you give them?" he asked. She didn't answer him, just

looked down at the children in her arms. He knelt beside them. Ida had a little powder on her lip. Rubbing the powder with his finger, he brought it to his own lips. It was the bitterest substance he had ever tasted. "You have to tell me what you've given them," he insisted, his heart beginning to beat faster with dread. "Alright," she said. She rose to her feet unsteadily. He followed her as she led him to the old bureau that was kept in the hallway. The key was still in the lock where she had opened the cabinet that contained the strychnine he'd purchased to poison the feral cats that had been killing their poultry. He thought he had hidden the key so only he knew where to find it. But there was the key in the lock, and he could still taste the bitterness in his mouth.

He turned and opened George's door. "Get up! And go get the doctor, quick!" Then he rushed back into the bedroom with Laura following him. Sarah and Ida were still on the floor, but they were screaming, their little faces drawn in pain. He collapsed on the floor beside them and pulled them into his lap. He tried to comfort them, praying inwardly that George would bring help soon enough.

They writhed uncontrollably in his lap. Their little legs and arms twisted violently and pulled tightly against his grasp. He tried to hold them, keep them straight, but he was afraid their small limbs would break in his hands. In too short of a time, they were no longer screaming, but instead were gasping for breath. Laura stood watching them. Ida was the first to go. Her face twisted permanently, lips pulled back dramatically displaying her clenched teeth.

He poured all his energy onto saving Sarah, whose back was beginning to arch unnaturally. He tried to rub her back, relax the muscles, relieve the pain, but it was too late. She died only a minute or two after Ida with her poor little body bowed backward.

Her feet touching her head.

There, in the room with their dead children, John looked at Laura. She was still sitting there. It was only moments before her body was attacked by the deadly grip he'd witnessed on his children. Her arms and legs began to draw and twitch. Her lips quirked up into the beginnings of the death mask. Oh no, not her too, he thought. He desperately hoped for the doctor to arrive. He held her tightly to him, but it was no use. It was too late.

When the doctor arrived with George, they rushed into the bedroom to find John on the hardwood floor holding the lifeless bodies of his family in his arms. The small amount of strychnine he'd ingested while trying to determine what the powder was had also put his own life in jeopardy.

Dawn the next morning brought no relief from the grief that welled in John's heart. In one horrible drawn out moment, he had lost every member of his young family, his 24-year-old wife, two little girls, and his baby son. The family doctor summoned the coroner to perform an inquest into the sudden deaths. George left on the first train to Savannah to purchase coffins to bring back so that John could bury his family. While George was in the city, he must have told more than one person the dramatic and tragic story.

The next day, the paper published a full account of the events, labeling the deaths a murder suicide committed by a deranged woman. While John mourned the loss of his family, others obsessed over the details of the night at his house in the country. People not directly affected by such tragic events often use them as fodder to feed their imaginations and turn the grief and loss of others into a spectacle. Newspapers all over

the country from hundreds of miles away reprinted the lurid details of the gruesome death that strychnine causes.³¹²

Elam Baptist Church held only a few scattered graves when John laid his wife and children to rest behind the church building where he'd attended Sunday services only days before. From Savannah, he ordered a slender white stone to mark the place where they'd been buried. The words engraved on the top emphasize his grief and loss and betray not an ounce of bitterness towards his wife for what she had done. With a hand pointing toward heaven, "To the memory of beloved and lost family," it went on to list each one's name and exact age at the time of their death. Below the recording of Laura, Sarah, Ida, and George, are the words "The ways of Providence are often dark and mysterious, yet we know what all things work together for the good of them who are the called according to His purpose."

These are the same words he'd written in his journal during the last months of war after Estella had died. They must have been a mantra that he repeated to himself in the darkest of his days to give himself a ray of hope to hold onto.

³¹² *Savannah Morning News*, July 25, 1871. I have taken some creative liberty in recreating this scene, but the details remain true to the facts as the sources relate them.

Conclusion

With all tragedies, the living must keep on living. Even when one is so devastated that it feels as if the world has stopped turning, time still goes on. Every morning, day after day, step after step, there are still chores to be done, bills to be paid, the daily details of life to be attended to. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the pain fades. It's never forgotten, traces of past love and pain and loss linger in the recesses of the heart long after loss. But there comes a time when it no longer feels as if the weight of grief is crushing. Perhaps that's how John felt. Faced with so much losses in early adulthood: the death of his first wife and young love and the awfulness of war. Only to come home from surrendering in North Carolina, fatigued by grief and poor living conditions to endure the death of a dear mother. Shouldering the responsibility for raising his older sister's orphaned sons while attempting to move on with life. Finally, remarrying and starting a family of three beautiful and loved babies, only to lose them and their mother in the most unimaginable and unforeseen way.

Maybe he felt once again, as he'd so often recorded on the pages of his journal, that times were so bad that he'd never find happiness in life again. Yet, he persisted. After Laura's death and losing all three of his young children, he continued on his path into the ministry. When he'd first conceived of the notion of being ordained, it had been partially in an effort to escape from the military of the Confederacy. Years later, he was finally achieving that goal he'd set for himself in the whirl of war.

In the summer of 1871, just before the great tragedy of his life, John and Laura had joined Elam Baptist Church. It was there that he met his third wife. A young lady

much younger than himself caught his eye, Eutoil Tallulah “Lula” Foy, daughter of George Washington and Mary Foy also belonged to that church. It was there that the two of them made their acquaintance. The Foyes were a quite prominent Effingham County family. George Washington Foy, Lula’s father had deeded a portion of his land to the Elam Baptist Church and helped build it. John was active in the church having been licensed to preach and was ordained by the regional organization in 1873.³¹³

In 1874, three years after the death of John’s second wife, he and Lula were married. They made a home for themselves just outside of the vibrant little village of Oliver right on the county line that separates Effingham and Screven counties. Perhaps because Little Ogeechee Baptist Church was a shorter distance from their new home, they switched memberships. For the rest of their lives they lived on the farm, gradually expanding it piece by piece by purchasing property from neighbors.

Two sons were added to their family, John Aubrey Ash and George Brinson Ash. Lula had a heart for children as she and John labored in the church and raised their sons. Still today nearly a hundred years after she last used it, her hitching post stands in the yard of Little Ogeechee Baptist Church as a memorial of her dedication. With an artistic passion, she painted watercolors. When her sons began hunting, she learned taxidermy so that the beautiful animals could be preserved rather than giving their lives in vain. When the boys reached adulthood, John Aubrey moved to Savannah and married. John and Lula made frequent trips to his home. The railroad connected the country to the city, and travel by rail was easy.

³¹³ *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia* (Compiled for the Christian index: Atlanta, GA 1881) p. 12-13.

The most striking thing about John in his later life was the stand he chose to take endorsing women's suffrage in 1913. A former Confederate soldier, one would think he would have retained a more conservative outlook. Yet, he stood up in the packed auditorium of the two story, wooden schoolhouse in Oliver and gave a speech supporting women's right to vote. The local newspaper columnist wasted no time skewering him for his opinion. His mother, sister, sisters in law, and his three wives no doubt had a hand in shaping his view of a woman's potential.

While John enjoyed an active social life in the then bustling little community of Oliver he remained connected to family and friends in Savannah, and he retained "the kindest and most sympathetic interest" in the city of his birth. In 1916, two years before his death he wrote a column for *The Savannah Press*. He waxed nostalgic as he described his memories of childhood in Savannah before it had been transformed by progress. The Bijou Theater now stood on Broughton Street replacing the house of his birth. "If we got south of Liberty street we were lost," John wrote as he described a boyhood of driving cows through the streets.

He saw himself as a historian of his own life, crediting his forbearers for instilling that habit into him. Over his lifetime, he'd curated the documents passed to him by his grandfather and father and added his own papers to that collection. "These are only a few of the vast number of papers and documents I have accumulated. I like to study them and look them over occasionally." At seventy-three, John had lived a long, full life. But he didn't see himself as old or worn down by the extraordinary events of that long and full, yet sometimes tragic life. "I am a young man yet. I haven't a gray hair in my head, and if

I shaved my beard I could pass for a man of 55.”³¹⁴

Following his long custom of visiting Savannah, in 1918 John went to the city to attend the annual meeting of Solomon’s Lodge of Masons. After an evening in town, he retired to son’s house on Maupas Avenue. Before he awoke the following morning, he suffered a stroke. After two weeks in the hospital, he died. His widow and sons buried him beside Laura in Old Elam Cemetery. His gravestone notes, “he had faith in God.” Many years later, in 1933, Lula also died. Her sons buried her on the other side of John.

The gravestones erected by those who survived Laura, John, and Lula stood in that little, abandoned cemetery beside that sandy road for approximately a century before that summer afternoon when, by chance, I discovered them. Granite memorials that marked the lives of each of them had been pelted by raindrops, battered by winds, occasionally covered in ice, and had collected the dust and pine needles of every season through the years. A lifetime is a blip on the surface of history. Usually, it passes and is only notable to those with whom it was shared or to the family that memorializes its ancestors in the consciences of their own descendants.

Little did I realize when I encountered the gravestones that day that my discovery of the Ash family would change the course of my life. But it has. When I found them I was incredibly young with little idea of how my future would unfold. What I did know, was that working in that small town bank left me unfulfilled and restless. My research into the lives of the Ashes led me unexpectedly onto the path of academia. Their life stories have been the impetus that drove me to earn two degrees. As I’ve worked to uncover sources an entire world opened up to me. In a way, uncovering their lives has

³¹⁴ *The Savannah Press*, December 14, 1916.

been similar to climbing into a time machine and rocketing myself back to the past. Through their eyes I can see the streets, houses, churches and schools where they walked, lived, worshiped, and learned. The old South of Savannah became real to me in a way that would have been impossible to imagine without the blueprints of their lives guiding me through. Secession and civil war became not just distant events to study. In my need to understand the sectional conflict as a catalyst that acted upon John's life, I dove into the literature and primary sources seeking to see it as he had.

Looking back, I'm still not completely certain of what it is exactly about the Ash family that grabbed my attention and even now won't quite let go. Perhaps it's just that they were regular people, not rich but not poor, who happened to live their lives in a time of great historical significance. One thing I do know is that I regard them with tenderness. In all their flawed yet common humanity, I've felt their joys and sorrows, and I feel as if I've come to know them. In this thesis, I've struggled to present them as realistically and fairly as possible. John left his papers for future generations to read and learn from, and I hope that I've helped him in that goal.

While this thesis is complete, the words on these pages only scratch the surface of the story of the Ash family. There are layers to be added and context to be created. Recreating a world that we live right on top of, but which has changed so much is a careful and deliberate work. Using the sources that the dead have left to the living, each stroke of the brush or artfully constructed sentence breathes life back into that long ago existence. Throughout this work, it has been my constant hope that my readers will come to know the Ash family as I have.

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Figure 2. Close up of inscription.

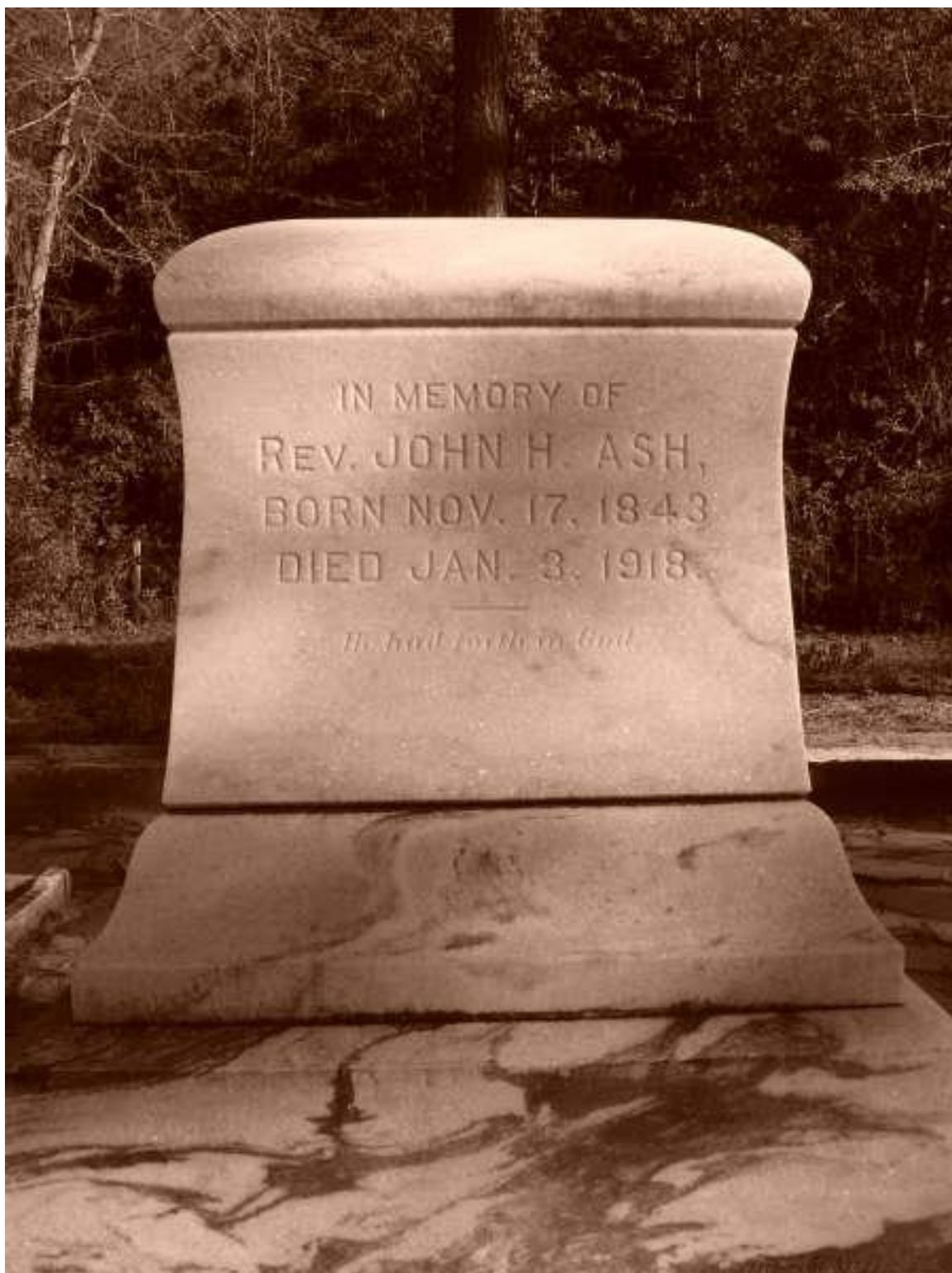


Figure 3. John H. Ash Gravestone.



Figure 4. Gravestone of Eutoil Talulah Ash.



Figure 5. Grouping of family stones.



Figure 6. John H. Ash in uniform.

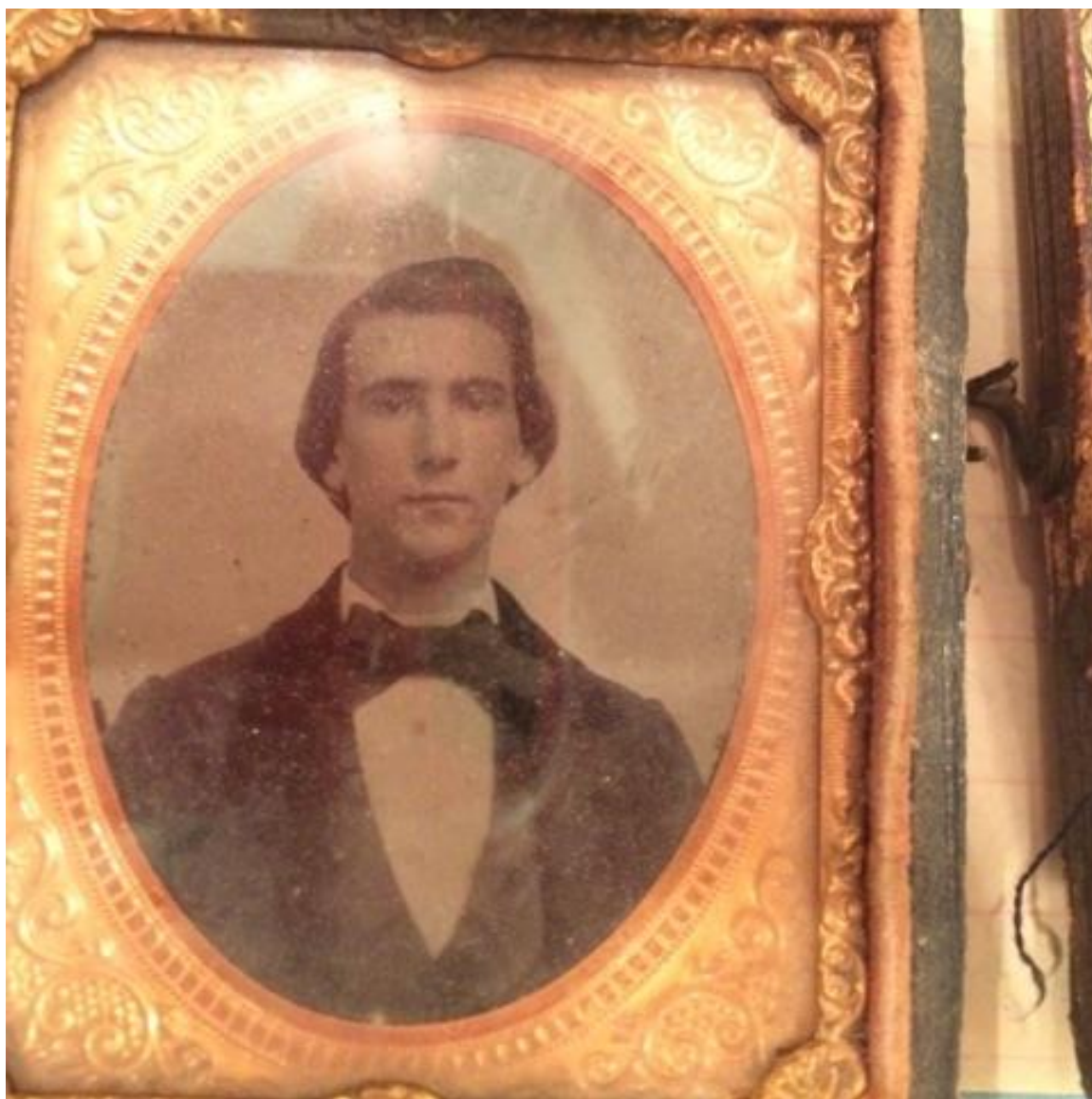


Figure 7. John H. Ash, clean-shaven.

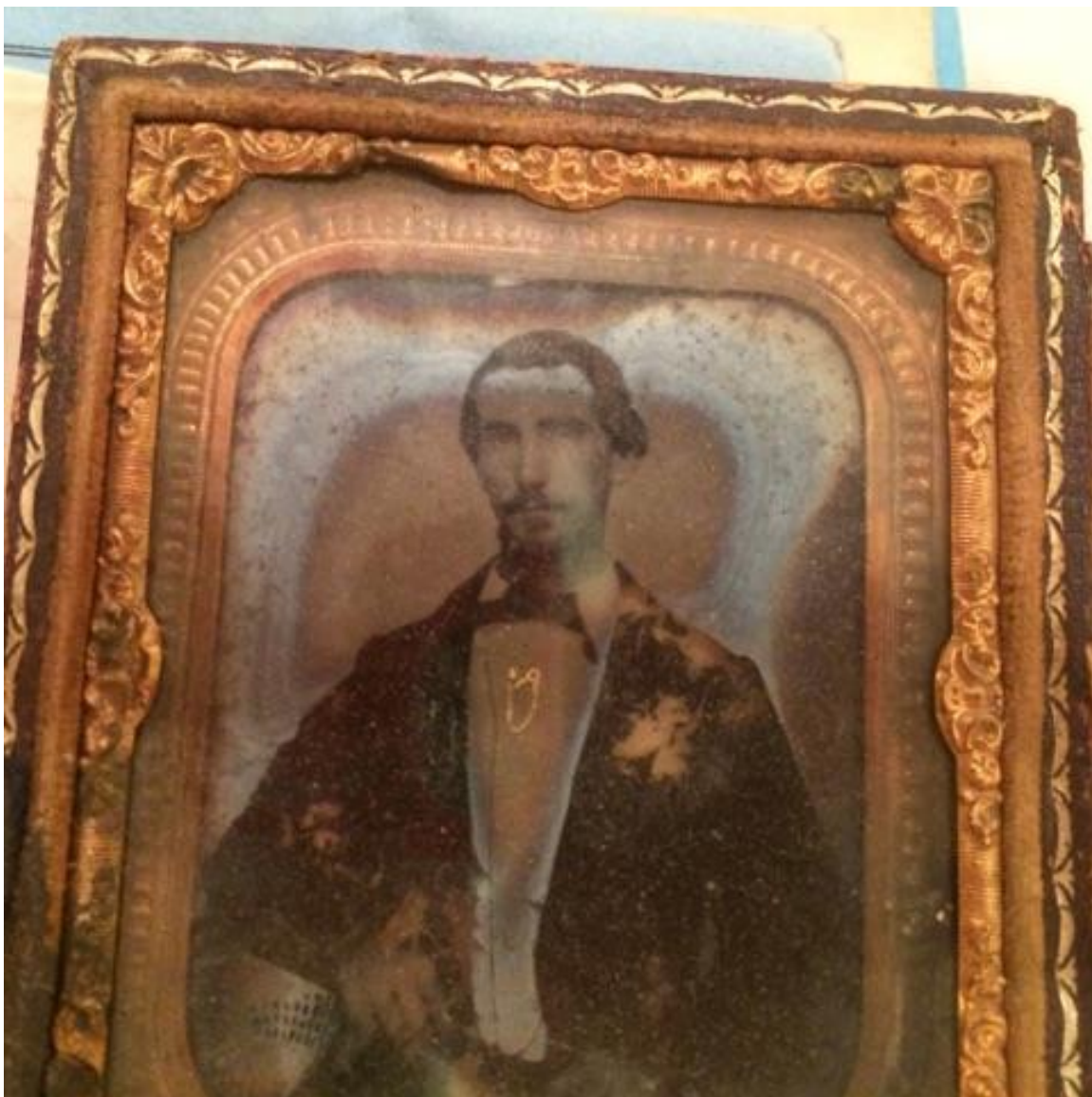


Figure 8. John H. Ash.

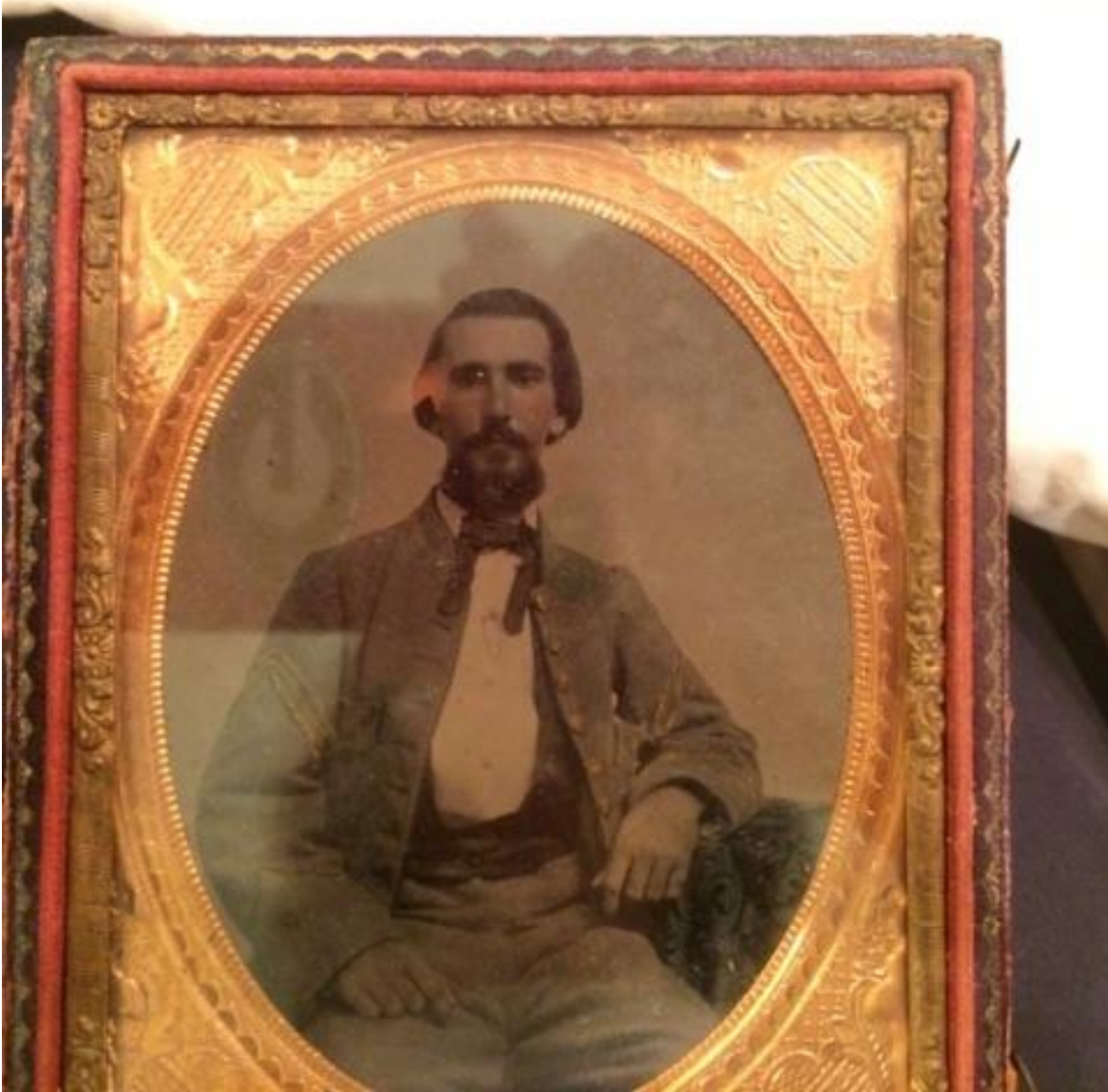


Figure 9. John H. Ash.



Figure 10. Eutoil Tallulah Foy.